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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

IMAGES OF DIVISION: A RETREAT FROM SELF IN HEBERT'S KAMOURASKA AND ATWOOD'S LADY ORACLE

BY

© RUTH V. MARTIN

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF: MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

EDMONTON, ALBERTA,

FALL 1986

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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Images of Division: A Retreat from Self in Hébert's Kamouraska and Atwood's Lady Oracle"

submitted by Ruth V. Martin

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

(Supervisor)

Date 20 June 1986

THIS THESIS IS DEDICATED TO

MY MOTHER

FOR HER COMMITMENT, ENCOURAGEMENT, DISCERNMENT

AND LOVE

ABSTRACT

The use of narcissistic narrative in postmodernist fiction evinces a phenomenon of a reversal of the traditional quest for self motif to that of a retreat from self motif. The contemporary concern for a concretization of the auto-referential, self-informing text is made explicit in much of the post World War 11 fiction and the criticism of the nineteen-seventies. The contemporary narrative transforms the authorial process of shaping, of making, into part of the pleasure and challenge of reading as a co-operative, interpretative experience, or, as Roland Barthes puts it, allows the reader to participate in the shaping of a text hence specifying the modern narrative fiction as **writerly.**

Canadian Novelists Anne Hébert and Margaret Atwood write, to different degrees, from the point of view of this postmodernist narrative fiction and their works, Kamouraska and Lady Oracle, respectively, evince the contemporary phonemenon of the retreat from self theme. Hébert and Atwood exploit a long tradition of folkloric beliefs in their use of certain images as vehicles to depict the theme of the retreat from self, or, the loss of identity in modern life. The images used in depicting a retreat from self include, the image of the Doppelgänger; the shadow and vampire images; dream images; images of death and images of hidden identity and the dissolution of the genre of the Gothic.

This thesis is concerned with demonstrating the way in which the self-conscious narrative (epitomized in the retreat from self theme) is used in Kamouraska and Lady Oracle through images depicting division.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of doubles, as defined and discussed by A. E. Crawley in The Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, distinguishes, from the inception, between the double-by-duplication and the double-by-division, though these distinct phenomena and psychological interpretations constantly mingle. One secondary distinction is that in the case of the double-by-division, the counterpart may be of a different substance from the original, essentially, a spiritual double. [1]

Duplicity, as summarized by Sherrill Grace in a discussion of Saussure and Jakobson, is the state of being double or two-fold, which is normal for most organic forms. The 'Duplicity Principle' itself refers to the doubleness of the retina in vertebrates which accounts for our ability to see. Duplicity, in a metaphorical sense, describes a doubleness of intention or purpose in order to deceive. [2] This state of being double and characterized by duplicity is the essence of both Hébert's Kamouraska and Atwood's Lady Oracle.

Ralph Tymms in his study Doubles in Literary Psychology discusses the concept of dual consciousness through the ideas advanced by Max Dessoir; up to a point, we are told, dual personality is a normal phenomenon, arising out of the existence of the so called two spheres of consciousness within the mind, of which one is latent, but which, endued with the faculties of understanding, sensation and will, is capable of determining a series of actions: the simultaneous presence of both spheres is termed dual consciousness. Dessoir advances, as proof of the existence of these spheres, examples of automatic actions, of which a familiar instance is one's capacity to carry out habitual gestures without

constant mental effort and while one's conscious mind is, in fact, engrossed by other thoughts. The subsequent absence of any recollection of such an action is explained by the existence of a double chain of memory, 'eine doppelte Gedächtniskette' in the normal mind. Further, Tymms points out, the human personality embraces at its most powerful extremes two persons, which we may briefly designate as the actual self and the apparent, or mirror self. At the moment when man begins to criticise his consciousness (awakening or spirituality) he splits up: these two persons come to life, to battle with one another. 'Actual-self pines for absolute, complete, unimpeachable reality; apparent-self lures one towards the enjoyment of mirror-reality (unreality), which is nothing else than man's self-glorification within his milieu.' [3]

Dessoir's theory may be applied to Hébert's protagonist Elisabeth, who consciously splits herself by choosing the apparent-self over the actual-self saying:

> La mémoire se cultive comme une terre. Il faut y mettre le feu parfois. Brûler les mauvaises herbes jusqu'à la racine. Y planter un champ de roses imaginaires, à la place. (K., 75) [4]

Elisabeth, Hébert's protagonist, retreats from self by evoking images of her double, or Doppelgänger. Elisabeth projects images of purity and goodness on her double, negating the demonic side of her personality. Her split from self usually occurs during moments of stress when she is unable to confront the reality of her personality and of her actions. The cyclical structure of the text and the narrative voice of interior monologue allows Hébert to create a world in which the protagonist

seemingly controls the narrative; but it is a control of hallucinations and of unconscious dream states of mind, a world not unsimilar to that of Dostoevsky's The Double.[5]

Hébert portrays a world in which the simple need to survive the trap of role-playing becomes all-inclusive. The trap that Betty Friedan first described in The Feminine Mystique is the trap that ensnares Elisabeth, the heroine of Kamouraska: to fulfill nothing more than her biological role, as idealized by the Nazis: 'Kinder, Küche, Kirche.'[6]

Elisabeth faces the dilemma of living up to the perfect image of a loving mother and wife or fulfilling her need to expand herself through others. To understand Elisabeth's retreat from her own identity, one must begin by understanding the world in which she lives. The Québec of the Eighteen-forties (the world of Elisabeth's tempestuous youth) was one of the absolutism of the father and husband and the total negation of any type of rights for the daughter and the wife. This unequitable division of power was even more true for the French Canadians than it was for the French and the English; indeed, even by 1869, John Stuart Mill was protesting the subjection of women when he wrote,

> ...the principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes - the legal subordination of one sex to the other - is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and that it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other. 7

In order to understand the way in which Hébert is able to create the multi-layered personality of her protagonist Elisabeth, we must be aware

of the narrative technique employed by the author. The story is told by Hébert's reaching into the mind of Elisabeth and presenting her thoughts. We are aware, however, that she for the most part, controls the highly subjective narrative:

> Quoi qu'on dise et quoi qu'on fasse, je demeure le témoin principal de cette histoire de neige et de fureur. (K., 184)

Her control of the narrative is possible because of Hébert's use of the technical device of interior monologue. The use of interior monologue is quite important when we consider the setting of the novel. A review article appearing in Le Soleil in 1970 discusses Hébert's use of interior monologue, saying that,

> C'est Elisabeth qui parle dans Kamouraska et c'est sa vie qu'elle nous raconte. Cependant, à côté du long monologue intérieur de madame Rolland, on sent la présence des autres, car dans une société bourgeoise enviée, jamais on n'est seul. Toujours se mêlent aux souvenirs d'Elisabeth, la voix confuse de la rumeur, la présence lourde comme une chape de plomb des autres .... Les autres, ce sont les trois tantes d'Elisabeth, les habitants de Sorel ou de Québec, les témoins qui viennent déposer au procès d'Elisabeth, et surtout cette petite Aurélie Caron double maléfique de George et d'Elisabeth. 8

During moments of emotional trauma interior monologue is used as Elisabeth detaches herself from the present world, and retreats into her youthful past. Elisabeth has such a painful and horrendous marriage to Antoine that she constantly retreats from the reality of the situation, becoming someone else. Through the retrospective eyes of Madame Rolland, we see that Elisabeth begins her retreat from self at the wedding to Monsieur Tassy:

> Penser à soi à la troisième personne. Feindre le détachement. Ne pas s'identifier à la jeune mariée, toute habillée de velours bleu. (K., 71)

Elisabeth places great importance on her image, going so far as to equate the image of her maternal respectability with that of Queen Victoria:

> Comment ose-t-on m'accuser d'avoir offensé la reine? Lorsqu'il est prouvé que je lui ressemble, comme une soeur, avec tous mes enfants autour de moi. Je ressemble à la reine d'Angleterre. Je me calque sur la reine d'Angleterre. Je suis fascinée par l'image de Victoria et de ses enfants. Mimétisme profond. Qui me convaincra de péché? (K., 34)

Elisabeth understands that she must preserve the image of the righteous old aristocratic family; she describes her own division between the reality of her life and the impossible image of goodness and virtue that she must always try to live up to, by describing the attitude of her aunts to her criminal situation:

> Nous leur apprendrons, à tous ces gens de rien, l'impunité due à certaines familles. Et puis la Petite fera le reste. Elle n'aura qu'à paraître pour confondre ses accusateurs; droite, hautaine, superbe et rouée. Cette chair rayonnante qu'elle a, la Petite, cette haute taille, ces robes bien coupées, cette morgue au coin de la bouche, le regard aveugle des statues, insoutenable. Elle passerait au coeur de feu, sans se brûler: au plus profond du vice sans que s'altère son visage. La tragique, dure vertu de la beauté suffisante, invente ses propres lois. Vous ne pouvez comprendre. Elle est au-dessus des lois ordinaires de la terre. (K., 47)

The image that Elisabeth has been brought up to project demands such impossible standards that she retreats from her true self and retreats into her memories, and her double, Mlle d'Aulnières, takes over:

> Ne pas courber l'échine. Ne pas clinger des yeux. Regarder par-dessus les têtes immobiles, à bandeaux tirés. Tous ces bonnets à ruchés, ces rubans de satin tombant sur les épaules. Feindre de fixer un point sur le mur. Le vide. Prisonnière. Je suis prisonnière. (K., 139)

Elisabeth invokes her double, her other self, by pretending that nothing is wrong. When Elisabeth and Doctor Nelson attend a ball together, she revels in the drama of her situation and splits herself into several images:

> Danseurs, danseuses et chaperons se figent et retiennent leur souffle. Quelle apparition dans l'encadrement de la porte. Mme Tassy et le docteur Nelson, grelottants, le visage rougi par le froid. Ne baissant pas les yeux. Insolents, quoique traqué. Ce bonheur étrange, cette victoire amère. La joie des fous, au bord du désespoir. (K., 138)

Critic Maurice Emond tells us that Elisabeth multiplies her visions of herself at the ball of Saint-Ours:

> Pour le bal du governeur et celui de Saint-Ours, Elisabeth veut multiplier sa vision; elle veut éprouver toutes les séductions de la vue et désire en même temps rayonner de beauté. 9

Elisabeth's perception of her past youth takes on the role of Mlle d'Aulnières, young and innocent, existing in a pre-fall state (to Elisabeth this is the happiness and freedom of her life before the marriage to Antoine Tassy). In order to be able to re-enact the scene of her husband's murder, she steps away from herself, retreating into her former life and hence allowing herself to be both an observer and accomplice in the drama:

> Moi, Elisabeth d'Aulnières, non pas témoin, mais voyante et complice. (K., 210)

The dual and duplicitous world in which Elisabeth exists is equally evident in Atwood's universe. Joan Foster, Atwood's heroine, is not limited to dual consciousness; her multi-layered existence can be described according to both of Crawley's definitions: double-by-duplication (Joan Foster, Louisa K. Delacourt, the Fat Lady, etc.) and, double by-division, as evinced in her art (Charlotte, Lady Redmond, Samantha, etc.), not to mention the spiritual double-by-division as Joan is confronted by her mirror image, her shadow image and images of vampires.[10]

The duplicitous nature of the novel as a whole is examined by critic Robert Lecker, who maintains that Lady Oracle is not only full of mirrors, masks and masquerades, which dress up Joan's perceptions, but of reduplicating interior narratives which enclose us in their shared distortions as well. Joan does not find identity nor does she surface to survive. Rather, the end of Lady Oracle returns us to its beginning, and to yet another version of Joan's celebrated ability to be many people and to speak in many tongues, all at once. The circular structure of the narrative resolution has become a sham; the multi-vocal heroine gives us her fragmented visions of modern life.[11]

Lecker's perceptive assessment of Atwood's novel is reinforced by Clara Thomas, in her essay "Lady Oracle; The Narrative of a Fool-Heroine," in which she argues that Joan is the victim of others: the unwanted daughter of an aggressive, insecure, unhappy woman and a passive, guilty man. This victimization does not command the sympathy of the reader, rather it projects Joan as a fool. As she tells her story, Joan thinks that she is relating all the data needed to explain her past

and her present; actually she is engaged in a highly selective, self-rationalizing and self-excusing process. A comedy, Thomas argues, is a process towards proportion and balance, and Atwood's purpose in the telling of Joan Foster's story is to have us see her as irrepressibly in process, not as an irreversibly fated product either of heredity or of environment. The reason that Joan is a fool, Thomas argues, is because she really has a will of iron, as inflexible as that of any of the pale, pure Gothic heroines she later writes about, and as inflexible as that of her mother. [12]

Thomas' interpretation is valid when Joan's duplicity is acknowledged as a key theme of the text. Joan is not just one person, she is many people, who are unable to survive in one single identity; she does, indeed, indulge herself in an oftentimes exhaustive self-rationalizing process and her foolishness is blatantly evident.

Duplicity as the thematic key to opening the door to Atwood's universe is the essence of defining the retreat from self in Lady Oracle. Sherrill Grace, in her essay "Margaret Atwood and the Poetics of Duplicity" explains that duplicity (deceit and doubleness) is a familiar Atwood subject and a fundamental Atwood concern. It informs her vision of this world, is at the root of her poetics, and is, indeed, the systematic model for her work. [13]

The protagonist Joan exhibits multi-dimensional personalities evincing both a coming together and a drawing apart of her own personality; the relevant question of this division is which is the better:

the illusion of the saving lie or the unhappiness of the honest reality? For Joan, life is a continual struggle between the comfort of illusion and the pain of reality; she says,

> I felt very visible. But it was as if someone with my name were out there in the real world, impersonating me, saying things I'd never said but which appeared in the newspapers, doing things for which I had to take the consequences: my dark twin, my funhouse-mirror reflection. She was taller than I was, more beautiful, more threatening. She wanted to kill me and take my place, and by the time she did this no one would notice the difference. (L.O., 251) 14

Atwood's protagonist drifts through life on a cloud of invented images, not a voyage in quest for self, rather a hasty retreat from self. To Joan, various self-imposed images of herself are a necessity of life, for truth inevitably leads to disaster.

Joan's retreat from self begins at a very early age and its roots lie in her relationship with her mother. Joan learns very early that she was named after a thin, glamourous film star:

> Did she give me someone else's name because she wanted me never to have a name of my own? Come to think of it, Joan Crawford didn't have a name of her own either. Her real name was Lucielle LeSueur, which would have suited me much better. Lucy the Sweat. (L.O., 42)

Later, Joan splits her consciousness more radically and begins her double life as Louisa K. Delacourt.

The image of Louisa K. Delacourt exemplifies Joan's fragmented visions of her own life; for example, Louisa K. is generally associated throughout the text with the Gothic romance: the two are constantly tied in with Joan's desperate attempt to escape from the self; she says,

> As long as I could spend a certain amount of time each week as Louisa, I was all right, I was patient and forebearing, warm, a sympathetic listener. But if I was cut off, if I couldn't work at my current Costume Gothic, I would become mean and irritable, drink too much and start to cry. (L.O., 213)

Joan needs Louisa's life because she is unable to live her own:

> I ran back to the apartment, closed myself into the bedroom, got out my typewriter, and shut my eyes. A tall man in a cloak, that was what I needed. All the time I'd been with the Royal Porcupine I hadn't written a word. Was this why my creatures seemed more real than usual, nearer to me, charged with an energy greater than I gave them? (L.O., 227)

Joan admits that she is terrified of living only one life, hence her retreat into the image of the Romance Novelist, and she also admits that the books themselves are not the reason for her retreat from self:

> The really important thing was not the books themselves which continued to be much the same. It was the fact that I was two people at once, with two sets of identification papers, two bank accounts, two different groups of people who believed I existed. (L.O., 213)

Joan's Doppelgänger influences not only her art, but also her choice of men. After having indulged in an elaborate self-examination and justification, Joan gains certain insights about her choice of men and her reasons for dividing her life:

> Every man I'd ever been involved with, I realized, had had two selves: my father, healer and killer; the man in the tweed coat, my rescuer and possibly also a pervert; the Royal Porcupine and his double Chuck Brewer; even Paul, who I'd always believed had a sinister other life I couldn't penetrate. Why should Arthur be any exception? I'd known he had phases, but I hadn't suspected this completely different side to his personality; not until now. The fact that I'd taken so long to discover it made it all the more threatening. (L.O., 292)

After Joan's already precarious lives threaten to merge, she is again confronted with her double, her once potential future:

> 'This used to be called the Bite-a-Bit,' I said. I didn't say I'd been the cashier, but there was my double behind the cash register, a heavy woman with bunned hair, wearing a black dress which showed her rippling elbows but not her bosom. One of my once potential futures, in the flesh; Mrs. Zerdo, no doubt. At this moment I envied her. (L.O., 278)

Joan envies all of her lives except the one in which she presently chooses to live; her Doppelgänger controls many aspects of her life and, like Elisabeth's Doppelgänger, it evinces the sinister, the demonic side of her being.

The following examination of images of division will reveal the motif of the Doppelgänger as central to the psychology of the retreat from self in Kamouraska and Lady Oracle and show some of the narrative devices by which the two Canadian woman authors have portrayed their protagonist's plight.

11. ANGELIC/DEMONIC: Duality of life in Kamouraska

This I say then, Walk in the Spirit,
and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.
For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit,
and the Spirit against the flesh,
and these are contrary the one to the other;
so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.

Galatians 5: 17-18

The nature of the time and space in which Elisabeth exists is one of the reasons that she is unable to come to terms with the dual nature of her personality, so she divides herself into several layers, mirroring that whom she would like to be and that which she would like others to see in her. According to Betty Friedan, this kind of image fantasy has a long and respectable history:

> In an earlier time, the image of woman was also split in two - the good, pure woman on the pedestal, and the whore of the desires of the flesh. The split in the new image opens a different fissure - the feminine woman, whose goodness includes the desires of the flesh, and the career woman, whose evil includes every desire of the separate self. 1

Friedan's explication of the divided woman can be applied to Hébert's portrayal of the character of Elisabeth. The latter consistently denies her demonic side while emphasizing the angelic one; Elisabeth will not admit that she is both. Elisabeth's obsession with her divided self is evident at the beginning of the novel:

> J'adore marcher dans les rues, l'idée que je me fais de ma vertu à deux pas devant moi. Ne quittant pas cette idée de l'oeil, un seul instant. Une surveillance de gardechiourme. L'idée, toujours l'idée. L'ostensoir dans la procession. Et moi emboîte le pas derrière, comme une dinde. C'est cela une honnête femme: une dinde qui marche, fascinée par l'idée qu'elle se fait de son honneur. Rêver m'échapper, perdre de vue l'idée fixe. (K., 9)

This is similar to Heine's Deutschland ein Wintermärchen and in Musset's Lorenzaccio, in which the protagonist deplores the impression of walking the streets with his double at his heels. Hébert's Elisabeth faces a similar fear boardering on paronoia.

Elisabeth is oftentimes Mlle d'Aulnières, with all the pretensions and assumed respectability that go with her aristocratic background. When accused by her aunt of complicity to murder, Madame Tassy replies,

> -Vous savez bien, tante Adélaide, que je tiens à mon honneur plus qu'à ma vie. Comment pouvez-vouz faire peser sur moi un assi injurieux soupcon? (K., 160)

Images of virginity and purity, juxtaposed with the image of a sullied evilness are Elisabeth's constant struggle; she wishes others to see her as pure and sweet, yet she has to admit the existence of the other side of herself:

> Le recevoir dans mes bras. Son corps de crucifié trop gras. Et moi une pietà sauvage, défigurée par les larms. (K., 38)

Other people's perceptions of Elisabeth are very important to her. After her husband of eighteen years dies, she seems to have achieved her goal of appearing to be an image of purity, as the servants remark,

> -Voyez donc comme Madame aime Monsieur. Voyez comme elle pleure ... (K., 249)

Madame Tassy sees too many parts of herself that she would not like to acknowledge, for example, "Une âme de vipère." The irony of the queenly appearance on the outside and the viper's soul on the inside is reinforced when Madame Tassy hears of her husband's murder:

> Aller son chemin de retour allégrement, vers la femme blonde et rousse qui flambe, rue Augusta, à Sorel. Lui apprendre joyeusement qu'elle est enfin devenue veuve et libre. Se méfier des larmes. (K., 223)

Yet Madame Rolland admits that her image is tarnished; she is able to recognize and accept the truth of her present reality, if only for the moment:

> Bon, offrons-leur sans vergogne l'envers de l'image de Victoria. Que ces enfants soient déconcertés et perplexes un bon coup. Cela les rendra moins bêtes. Cheveux et vêtements en désordre, voici votre mère, émergeant d'un sommeil de quelques heures, visité par les démons. (K., 34)

It becomes increasingly clear that Elisabeth is unable to escape from her past in the reality of her everyday life, yet she will not accept this reality, even though she perceives that her husband has never believed that she was really innocent:

> Le fond de l'océan raclé de ses pauvres trésors. La précise mémoire des fous ramène les faits comme des coquillages. On vit comme si rien n'était et voici que le poison au fond du coeur remonte soudain, Jérôme ne m'a sans doute jamais pardonné. (K., 27)

Elisabeth invokes her past childhood, seeing herself as having been pure and innocent; all is an image of virginal chastity as her double re-appears:

> Dans cet espace réduit, dans cet air gris qui se raréfie, surgit une communiante. Tout de blanc vêtue, de la tête aux pieds. Son long voile pend jusqu'à terre. Sur sa tête une couronne de roses blanches. Je ne puis faire un mouvement. Dans sa main lourde, dans mon bras pétrifié, doucement meurt l'esquisse vaine d'un signe de croix. Une enfant qui est moi me regarde, bien en face, et me sourit gravement. M'oblige à écouter la voix légère et solennelle que je croyais perdue. (K., 58)

Her duality is again brought into focus by her retreat from her demonic side, which enjoys her sexual relationship with her husband, and an

attempt to enlist sympathy for her angelic side from her aunts. She says,

> Pauvres saintes femmes de la rue Augusta. De jour, je veux bien pleurer sur épaule. Votre la mort du coupable. N'être plus qu'un appât dolent aux yeux battus que l'on place en première ligne, afin de mieux confondre le mari monstrueux ... mais de nuit, je redeviens la complice d'Antoine. (K., 100)

Elisabeth constantly envisions her demonic side, but negates it; she separates her demonic and angelic sides in an irreconcilable manner. When her marriage is over, Elisabeth tries to believe that her virginity will be restored:

> Me voici libre et stérile. Comme si nul homme ne n'avait jamais touchée. Quelques jours encore et je serai purifiée. Libre. (K., 118)

Elisabeth goes so far as to equate the murder of Antoine with God's will, as a holy sacrifice, thereby perverting biblical teachings by calling something evil something good, purely for selfish reasons:

> Il faut qu'Antoine meure et que je sois sauvée de la mort. Amoureuse et fidèle. Pure et douce. Il faut aussi que George soit sauvé. Par la mort d'Antoine. Célébrer ce sacrifice. Il le faut. Vivre. (K., 167)

Elisabeth knows that she is playing a role, yet she is unable to accept the fact that a major part of her character is bad. She says of her own duality:

> La jeune épouse sourit doucement, encore toute pâlotte de ses couches. Le coeur souterrain, l'envers de la doucer, sa doublure violente. Votre fin visage, Elisabeth d'Aulnières. Mince pelure d'ange sur la haine. A fleur de peau. (K., 9)

From Elisabeth's point of view, her demonic side is a disreputable secret and she is above possessing that sort of thing.

Duplicity, in the form of a dualistic good side of conscience versus an evil side is not applicable solely to Elisabeth; from her highly subjective all-inclusive narration, we see the same duality imposed upon her mother-in-law, Madame Tassy, is portrayed in direct antithesis to Elisabeth's aunts. While the aunts always try to be an image of virtuous respectability, the mother-in-law accuses everyone and everything of role playing; of enacting dramatic parts in a theatre. Elisabeth is generally unkind in her descriptions of Antoine's mother, mainly because the elderly aristocratic lady discerns the truth of the duplicitous nature of Elisabeth's character and the character of others.

An amusing juxtaposition exists between the aunt's attempt at pampering the image of the consumptive Princess and Elisabeth imagining her mother-in-law accusing her of playing a role,

> Ma tante Adélaide me met des compresses sur le font. Pleure avec moi. Un goût de fer me monte à la bouche. Je crache du sang. Quelle vielle sorcière me souffle à l'oreille que tout cela c'est du théâtre? (K., 245)

The aunts are always trying to live up to the self-imposed images of angelic virtue; the mother-in-law, by comparison, pretends to be nothing more than what she is: a bitter, miserly, unsympathetic, miserable old hen, at least in Elisabeth's eyes; Elisabeth says,

> Les larmes n'entrent pas dans son ordre. Pour ma belle-mère, larmes et crises de nerfs font partie de ce monde excess, inconvenant et douteux que, faute d'un autre mot, elle appele le théâtre. (K., 78)

The three aunts are all image; their religion is all pretense. Elisabeth has been brought up in a manner that glorifies a retreat from the natural self into images of purity, chaste religion and worthiness.

Elisabeth's division from self begins at a very early age, its roots lying in her role-models: these three spinster aunts. Indeed, years later, Madame Rolland likens her duplicitous personality to the multiplicity of divisions in her aunts:

> C'est peu d'avoir une double vie, madame Rolland. Le plu difficile serait d'avoir quatre ou cinq existences secrètes, à l'insu de tous. Comme ces dévotes qui marmonnent des chapelets interminables, tandis que dans leur sang coule le venin des vipères. (K., 75)

The duplicitous nature of Elisabeth's aunts is made clear when they agree to lie, under oath, on the witness stand:

> Est-ce que les saintes femmes vivent? Se lèvent de grand matin pour aller prêter un faux serment, n'ont qu'une idée en tête, qu'un seul mot d'ordre bien précis? Risquer son âme, mais sauver l'honneur de la famille. (K., 47)

Women who associate with Elisabeth, as exemplified by her aunts, as well as the men, exhibit a duplicitous nature. For example, religion is a means for Antoine to express his madness and his demonic side, when he equates himself with a child of the devil; Hébert writes,

> Mon père, je me roule dans la fange. Mon père, je dis des obscénitiés. Un débauché. Un faiseur de grimaces. Des cabrioles de bloc. Des sauts de truite. Des grognements de truie. Mon père, je ne suis qu'un comique plein de cognac et de bière, de caribou. Pouh! (K., 86)

As Elisabeth indulges herself in an exhaustive process of self-justification she portrays her murdered husband as a psychotic madman bent on self-destruction. Elisabeth's subjective voice suggests that Antoine would eventually have died through self-abuse:

> Il boit du caribou. Il mange de la galette chaud ... Je crois que j'ai un peu trop bu. Cette brûlure vive dans des gobelets de fer-blanc. (K., 72)

Antoine asks Elisabeth's aunt to pray for him as he is mad and full of the demonic:

> -Salut, soeur Adélaide. Bon matin. Bonne messe. Priez pour moi. Je suis fou, soeur Adélaide. (K., 102)

Elisabeth prays to God to be delivered from the demonic madness that is her husband:

> 'Déliverez-nous du mal.' Tandis que le mal dont il faut me déliverer, à tout prix, s'incarne à mes côtés, sur le banc seigneurial. Prend le visage congestionné, les mains tremblantes de l'homme qui est mon mari. (K., 90)

Neither is Elisabeth's ill-fated love George Nelson exempt from her searing recollections of the nature of man. Elisabeth is haunted throughout her life by the image of her gentle, kind lover, as a demonic, evil murdered:

> Il frappe jusqu'à l'usure de la force surhumaine en lui déchainée. Maitre de la vie et de la mort. Un instant le vainqueur essuie son visage sur ma manche. Cherche dans son coeur la femme pour laquelle ... désire s'accoupler immédiatement avec elle. Triomphalement. Avant que ne déclinent sa puissance et sa folie. Avant que ne s'apaise son ivresse. Déjà on pourrait croire que cet homme est cerné par les larmes. Un tel épuisement point en lui, comparable à celui des dous après leur crise, à des femmes après leur acouchement, à celui des amants aprés l'amour. (K., 235)

Elisabeth expresses the multiplicity of Doctor Nelson's character through images of his unconventional past (an American of English descent, and a Protestant, who lives in French-Catholic Québec):

> On vous craint, docteur Nelson. Comme si, au fond de votre visible charité, se cachait une redoutable identité ... plus loin que le protestantisme, plus loin que la langue anglaise, la faute originelle ... cherchez bien ... ce n'est pas un péché, docteur Nelson, c'est un grand chagrin. (K., 128)

Elisabeth's portrayal of the psychotic side of George Nelson's personality suggests her own internal struggle with her good and evil natures:

> Il se tourne vers moi. Mon Dieu, est-ce ainsi que je vais retrouver son beau visage, envahi, trituré, détruit par le rire. (K., 240)

Elisabeth's subjective imposition of duality on every person she knows is an effective narrative tool with which Hébert is able to portray a world-view of duplicity; the age-old struggle between good and evil (the angelic and the demonic) is a central theme in Kamouraska and indespensible in justifying the retreat from self.

CHAPTER III: IMAGES OF HIDDEN IDENTITY IN LADY ORACLE

Your mind can be compared to a mirror, which reflects everything that appears before it. From the time you begin to think, to feel, and to exert your will, shadows are cast upon your mind which distort its reflections. This condition we call delusion, which is the fundamental sickness of human beings. The most serious effect of this sickness is that it creates a sense of duality, in consequence of which you postulate 'I' and 'not I.' The truth is that everything is one, and this is, of course, not a numerical number. Falsely seeing oneself confronted by a world of separate existences, this is what creates antagonism, greed, and inevitably, suffering. The purpose of zen is to wipe away from the mind these shadows or defilements so that we can intimately experience our solidarity with all life. Love and compassion then naturally and spontaneously flow forth.

Zen Master Yostitani-Rashi

Atwood structures the pieces of her text in such a manner as to give credibility to the theme of duplicity in Lady Oracle, namely in the depiction of Joan's reasons for her retreat from self. The structure of Lady Oracle presents the reader with certain facts about Joan's life which span the time from before Joan's birth to a point approximately thirty-five years later which continues with Joan's present existence. Every event described within this period depicts a universe of doubleness and duplicity; from this pivotal thematic point we are able to piece Joan's hidden identities into a meaningful cohesive order. Joan's parents are presented as the key reason why Joan later splits herself, at least according to her own recollections:

> I ate to defy her, but I also ate from panic. Sometimes I was afraid I wasn't really there, I was an accident, I'd heard her call me an accident. Did I want to become solid, solid as a stone so she wouldn't be able to get rid of me? What had I done? Had I trapped my father, if he really was my father, had I ruined my mother's life? I didn't dare to ask. (L.O., 78)

Joan never really learns if her father is really her father;--as a child she remembers a conversation between her parents:

> 'You don't know what it was like, all alone with her to bring up while you were over there enjoying yourself.'
> My father: 'I didn't enjoy myself.'
> And once: 'It's not as though I wanted to have her. It's not as though I wanted to marry you. I had to make the best of a bad job if you ask me.'
> My father: 'I'm sorry it hasn't worked out for you.' (L.O., 77)

Joan's relationship with her father is an ambiguous one. What she perceives as his duplicitous nature is characterized by his occupation:

> 'When people try to kill themselves,' my mother said, 'your father brings them to life again.' (L.O., 72)

He is a shadowy figure, always overshadowed by Joan's mother, always in the background, until the actual death of his wife. Joan perceives her father as being two distinctly different people. First, the quiet, submissive husband and father who is never really at home, and, much later, the competent, respected surgeon, hidden by a mask, who brings people back to life:

> I stood outside the door, waiting, and finally he came out. I'd never seen him dressed in his official uniform: he had a white cap on and a gown, and a mask over the lower half of his face, which he was in the act of pulling down. He looked much more impressive than he ever had at home, he looked like someone with power. (L.O., 137)

Joan later finds out that her father had been responsible, during the war, for killing people; his exact occupation at the time is unclear, yet his past life as killer is drastically different from his present life as healer:

> His position was the position of a man who had killed people and brought them back to life, though not the same ones, and these mysteries are hard to communicate. Other than that, his position was that of a man who wears maroon leather slippers and fiddles with house plants on the weekends, and for this reason is thought of as an inconsequential fool by his wife. (L.O., 138)

After structuring the duplicitous nature of Joan's father and, later, her mother, some facts are learned about Joan's childhood. As a child coming home from Brownies, Joan's girlfriends tie her to a bridge in a ravine and run away screaming that the bad men will get her. Joan, not knowing who the bad men are or what they will do, stands tied to

the bridge crying in despair. A man does come along, he is carrying a handful of yellow daffodils and exposes himself to her. Joan, because her childish eyes do not know fear or loathing, simple accepts the situation. She is told subsequently, however, that this was indeed a bad man, and the image of the daffodil man as rescuer or villain recurrs throughout the novel, as Joan's lives separate and come together; the daffodil man is yet another example of the duplicity in Joan's world:

> I wasn't sure, though: was it the daffodil man or not? Was the man who untied me a rescuer or a villain? Or, an even more baffling thought: was it possible for a man to be both at once? (L.O., 64)

This event from Joan's childhood initiates a life-long belief that men are both rescuers and villains. The men that Joan chooses are consistently those who have more than one obvious identity. This is carried to extremes in the external appearance of the Royal Porcupine, but made, nonetheless, equally evident in the character of Paul, ex-patriot and writer of Costume Gothics:

> His first name was Tadeo but he preferred to be called Paul, his third name, after Saint Paul, who was a systematic man, no loose ends. His idea of the good life was that it should be tidy. (L.O., 151)

Joan chooses a man who has several lives, but though the lives are all neatly separated, they seldom merge,

> It's an odd term, 'mistress,' but that was how he thought of me, these were the categories into which his sexual life was arranged: wives and mistresses. I was not the first mistress. For him there was no such thing as a female lover. (L.O., 150)

Paul does not see life in grey's, only in black and white, a personality trait entirely unknown to Joan, whose various identities are all grey:

> When he discovered that I wasn't the easygoing art student manquée he'd thought I was - when he realized he had deprived me of my virginity - Polish Count was filled with remorse. 'What have I done?' he said mournfully. 'My poor child. Why didn't you say something?' But anything I could have said would have been implausible. This was the reason I fabricated my life, time after time: the truth was not convincing. (L.O., 150)

Paul is the one who introduces Joan to writing Costume Gothics; through him, she is able to delve into a world of escape into the ultimate fantasy life:

> He gave me a peculiar, twisted smile. 'I never read those trashy books by Mavis Quilp.'
> 'Then why do you have fourteen of them in your library?'
> Perhaps Paul was a secret agent - which would explain the revolver - and the Quilp books were messages in code. He was smiling. 'I write those trashy books by Mavis Quilp.' (L.O., 154)

Interestingly enough, Paul chooses the pen-name of Quilp to describe a part of himself as he perceives it to be:

> Quilp ... this is a character from Dickens, it is a deformed malicious dwarf. This is what I see myself to be, in this country; I have been deprived of my stature, and I am filled with bitter thoughts. (L.O., 155)

Joan begins to perceive Paul as a madman, hence decides to get out of the relationship; she is unable to cope with his exclusive identity of jealous lover:

> I began to feel a little like Eva Braun in the bunker: what was I doing with this madman, how did I get into this thoroughly sealed place, and how could I get out? (L.O., 158)

Joan eventually escapes from what seems to her a Hitler-like bunker into the arms of another man, but years later, her past merges into her

present, as Paul seeks her out, and comes back into her life, with the intent of saving her from a band of imaginary blood-thirsty communists:

> He swam before me in a haze of nostalgia. Was this my lost love, my rescuer? (L.O., 280)

Paul himself lives in a world of the past, of European dreams and picture-book fantasies of war. He imagines himself as a strong warrior charging on towards the weak enemy; he has no real conception of contemporary warfare, preferring to live in the illusion of his mind. Paul's perception of war is based on his knowledge of the Polish army charging on horseback against the German tanks in 1939:

> But he didn't picture war as tanks, missiles and bombs, he pictured it as himself on horseback, with a sabre, charging against impossible odds. (L.O., 158)

In fact, when Paul does re-enter Joan's life to save her from the communists, he is able to live out his own fantasy of the charging hero saving the fair maiden from the evil abductors:

> He probably didn't want me at all, he wanted the adventure of kidnapping me from what he imagined to be a den of fanged and dangerous Communists, armed to the teeth with brain-suction devices and slaughterous rhetoric, I in their midst bound hand and foot by jargon. (L.O., 283)

Joan later replaces the Polish Count with the Royal Porcupine (Chuck Brewer). Joan chooses men with titles as she engages in a process of self-association with her Gothic heroines. The Royal Porcupine, like the Polish Count, evinces blatant characteristics of a dual existence:

> For him reality and fantasy were the same thing, which meant that for him there was no reality. But for me it would mean there was no fastasy, and therefore no escape. (L.O., 270)

Joan admits that she does not want a lover who is just like other people. She wants a man who will meet the specifications of her fantasy figures:

> But I didn't want him to spoil things, I didn't want him to become grey and multi-dimensional and complicated like everyone else. Was every Heathcliff a Linton in disguise? (L.O., 269)

Joan actually lives out one of her fantasy lives when she begins her affair with the Royal Porcupine:

> Finally I had someone who would waltz with me, and we waltzed all over the ballroom floor of his warehouse, he in his top hat and nothing else, I in a lace tablecloth, to the music of the Mantovani strings, which we got at the Crippled Civilians. (L.O., 254)

All dances come to a close, however, and Joan soon begins to tire of the routine of the fantasy:

> Most of the time I'd go over to the house of the Royal Porcupine. But something was changing. The lace tablecloth which I waltzed with him was turning itself back into a lace tablecloth, with a rip in it; the black pointed boots were no longer worth the pain they inflicted. Motels became motels, and what they meant to me now was hard work and embarrassment.... (L.O., 267)

The Polish Count and The Royal Porcupine are passing flings in Joan's life; the central relationship exists between Joan and her husband Arthur. Joan's relationship with her husband Arthur is one in which the art of lying is the centre. Camouflage and counterfeiting typify Joan's attitude to her marriage; she is reeling in terror at the thought of her husband finding out about her various selves: she is afraid that if Arthur knows the truth of her character, he will reject her. Arther himself is quite a mediocre, normal kind of personality; he is only one

person, though often moody. His separate selves exist in Joan's mind, where she sometimes equates his external characteristics with spy-like features:

> He was usually stopped at international boarders. It was because he looked so furtive; furtive but correct, like a spy. (L.O., 8)

Joan justifies her perceptions of Arthur as having a separate self (that of a spy) by mentioning his preference for a lifestyle of attempted transience:

> Also, he liked living out of suitcases. It must've made him feel like a political refugee, which was probably one of his fantasies, though he never said so ... he valued the illusion of transience more highly than the illusion of permanence, and out entire marriage took place in a kind of spiritual train station. (L.O., 24)

Years later, when Joan is alone in Italy, she decides to let Arthur know that she is not dead, that her assumed death was a hoax, and, imagining him to be like the Scarlet Pimpernel, she places the burden of the rescuer upon Arthur's shoulder, assuming that he will come and save her:

> After I'd mailed it I felt much better. Everything would be all right; as soon as he got the postcard Arthur would fly across the ocean, we would embrace, I'd tell him everything, he would forgive me, I would forgive him and we could start again ... He would grow a beard or a moustache - something distinguished and pointed, not the amorphous frizz that made men look like out-of-control armpits - and he might even dye his hair. (L.O., 183)

In other words, Joan wants Arthur to become another person, an image of the right man to fit into her next fantasy life.

Joan is immature in her inability to trust Arthur with the truth of her duplicity; she never reveals the truth of her past and never tells him anything that is real:

> I should have trusted him more. I should have been honest from the beginning, expressed my feelings, told him everything. (But if he'd known what I was really like, would he still have loved me?) The trouble was that I wanted to maintain his illusions for him intact, and it was easy to do, all it needed was a little restraint: I simply never told him anything important. (L.O., 36)

Arthur is presented as something of a fool, when he endeavours to find some information about Joan's past and discusses only one small item, hardly worth mentioning:

> 'Arthur,' I said, 'you sneaky old spy.' I was delighted that he'd been jealous or curious enough to have done this: I also saw that he was pleased at having penetrated my disguise. But how annoyed he'd be if he discovered he'd only made it as far as the first layer ... I decided to postpone my revelations to some later date. (L.O., 198)

Athough Arthur is portrayed as an inept fool, Joan's predominant feeling is one of guilt at having lied so much. She singles out her own segregated, messy lives in contrast to the relatively neat way in which Arthur exists:

> ... (that was the difference between us: for Arthur there were true paths, several of them perhaps, but only one at a time. For me there were no paths at all. Thickets, ditches, ponds, labyrinths, morasses, but no paths). (L.O., 169)

When Frazer Buchanan finds out the facts about Joan's past and threatens blackmail, she is terrified that Arthur will find out the extent of her deception:

> What had he found out? Who would tell? Arthur, I thought. Arthur will know. My hidden selves, my other lives, unworthy. I couldn't let that happen. (L.O., 286)

After Arthur discovers the picture of the overweight Joan, she lies to

him because she does not trust him with the reality of her past self:

> It hurt me to betray myself like that. The picture was an opening and I should have taken it, it was still early enough for such risks. Instead I retreated behind the camouflage of myself as Arthur perceived me. I suppose I couldn't trust him with all that discarded misery, I didn't think he would be able to handle it. He wanted me to be inept and vulnerable it's true, but only superficially. Underneath this was another myth: that I could permit myself to be inept and vulnerable only because I had a core of strength, a reservoir of support and warmth that could be drawn on when needed. (L.O., 92)

Joan's feelings of guilt about the lies she had told Arthur are evinced by her directly announcing that she is an imposter:

> 'The landlord found some of those leaflets ... he's violently right-wing, you know. There was a terrible row.' (This was a version of the truth, I felt. Paul was the landlord, sort of, and he was right-wing. Nevertheless I was an imposter, and I felt like one). (L.O., 170)

Yet Joan consciously chooses lies over truth, for she believes that her life experiences are pretty much duplicitous:

> (Later I decided that his indifference at the time was probably not feigned at all. I also decided that passionate revelation scenes were better avoided and that hidden depths should remain hidden; facades were at least as truthful). (L.O.,197)

Joan comes to the realization that she will have to tell Arthur the truth, while she is living a separate life as Louisa K. Delacourt, writer of Costume Gothics:

> I longed to marry Arthur, but I couldn't do it unless he knew the truth about me and accepted me as I was, past and present. He'd have to be told I'd lied to him, that I'd never been a cheerleader, that I myself was the fat lady in the picture. I would also have to tell him that I'd quit my job as a wig-seller several months before and was currently

> finishing Love Defied, on the proceeds of which I expected to live for at least the next six months. (L.O., 198)

Joan envisions the negative reaction that Arthur will have if he finds out about her duplicity:

> He wouldn't be able to contain himself, he would exclaim at my transformation and tell humerous stories about my former size and weight, and Arthur would know - on our wedding day, how deeply I'd deceived him.... (L.O., 200)

Arthur would also find out her pretense at taking extra jobs, while really writing Costume Gothics:

> At first our life was unsettled. We had no money except what I could earn by writing Costume Gothics and pretending to take odd jobs.... (L.O., 208)

Yet Joan expresses herself almost resentfully, that she has to live this life of lies, out of self-defense:

> I would have to pretend I was going out to look for a job, and from time to time I would really get one, in self defense. (L.O., 213)

By the end of the novel, Atwood's universe of doubles and duplicity is brought together, as the protagonist Joan experiences people from her past coming into her present, threatening to expose her separate lives:

> I was suffering again from self-doubt. The difficulty was that I found each of my lives perfectly normal and appropriate, but only one at a time. When I was with Arthur, the Royal Porcupine seemed like a daydream from one of my less credible romances, with an absurdity about him I tried to exclude from my fiction. But when I was with the Royal Porcupine, he seemed plausible and solid. Everything he did and said made sense in his own terms, whereas it was Arthur who became unreal: he faded to an insubstantial ghost, a washed out photo on some mantlepiece I'd long ago

> abandoned. Was I hurting him, or was I being unfaithful? How could you hurt a photograph? (L.O., 259)

Joan's perceptions about her divided life become evident in her art, as her own selves are imposed upon the characters she writes about:

> She refused to be doomed. As long as she stayed on her side of the door she would be safe. Cunningly, he began his transformations, trying to lure her into his reach. His face grew a white gauze mask, then a pane of mauve-tinted spectacles, then a red beard and mustache, which faded, giving place to burning eyes and icicle teeth. Then his cloak vanished and he stood looking at her sadly; he was wearing a turtle-neck sweater.... (L.O., 342)

Joan incorporates into this description the duplicity of her father, Paul (the Polish Count), Frazer Buchanan, the daffodil man, Chuck (the Royal Porcupine) and her husband Arthur. Despite this evidence of her own paranoid state of mind, Joan is entirely unable to admit the truth of her duplicity; she says,

> I should have trusted him more ... the trouble was that I wanted to maintain his illusions for him intact ... But it wasn't honesty that would have saved me, I thought; it was more dishonesty. In my experience, honesty and expressing your feelings could lead to only one thing: Disaster. (L.O., 37)

Joan recognizes that the open-marriage philosophy of tell-all is a sham and that disaster follows too much truth, a further reason she gives for splitting her life.

Joan is, perhaps, only just an image; she assumes the roles that other people impose upon her:

> I would begin but my voice would sound false, even to myself. I'd always found other people's versions of reality very influential and I was beginning to think that maybe he was right, maybe I did have a secret lover. (L.O., 160)

Even if Joan does not fear impending disaster, she admits to herself that the real reason she will not expose her various lives is that she actually likes having more than one life:

> The thought of going on with the same kind of life for ever and ever depressed me. I wanted to have more than one life. (L.O., 141)

When opening fortune cookies in a Chinese restaurant, Joan will not believe her own innocuous message, but assumes that of Marlene because this deals with duplicity and deception:

> 'I got the wrong one too,' I said. Marlene's, I felt, was meant for me. **It is often best to be oneself,** whispered the small, crumby voice, like a conscience except which one? And if I was ever to begin, think how appalled they would be. (L.O., 231)

One of the reasons that Joan gives for not acknowledging her separate selves is that of fear:

> Now I wanted to be acknowledged, but I feared it. If I brought the separate parts of my life together (like uranium, plutonium, harmless to the naked eye, but charged with lethal energies) surely there would be an explosion. Instead I floated, marking time. (L.O., 217)

Joan threatens, throughout the text, to blow up or explode, like uranium or plutonium, but her internal explosion, like the actual dynamite that she and Chuck blow up in the park, would be primarily a meaningless gesture, the blast heard only by the participants. The duality of her personality is manifest by her hidden identity evincing an erupting volcano underneath the calm exterior; she says,

> What he didn't know was that behind my smile of compassion was a set of tightly clenched teeth, and behind that a legion of voices crying, 'What about me? What about my own pain? When is it my

> turn?' But I'd learned to stifle these voices, to be calm and receptive. (L.O., 92)

As an overweight teenager in high-school, Joan responds to her friends with a hypocritical mask:

> But they guessed nothing about me. I was a sponge, I drank it all in but gave nothing out, despite the temptation to tell everything, all my hatred and jealousy, to reveal myself as the duplicitous monster I knew myself to be. I could just barely stand it. (L.O., 95)

Years later, while staring at a stone statue in Rome, Joan confronts the lie of hr duplicity with anger:

> I stood licking my ice-cream cone, watching the goddess coldly. Once I would have seen her as an image of myself, but not anymore. My ability to give was limited, I was not inexhaustible. I was not serene, not really. I wanted things, for myself. (L.O., 253)

Despite Joan's violent counterpart, an angry, demanding double struggling to get to Joan's surface, she concretely takes the identity of her aunt Lou, as a means of escaping from herself: Joan admits that she has at least two identities (Joan Foster and Louisa K. Delacourt):

> I'd always tried to keep my two names and identities as separate as possible. (L.O., 33)

After having formally received a passport and other documentation in the name of Louisa K. Delacourt, Joan says,

> This was the formal beginning of my second self. I was amazed at how easily everyone believed me, but then, why should they suspect? (L.O., 13)

The duplicity of life evinced in protagonist Joan is extended to other female characters, such as Leda Sprott.

According to the nature of Atwood's universe, Joan learns that Spiritualist Leda Sprott has more than one identity. Leda Sprott is another minor character whose duplicitous life evinces a further retreat from self in Lady Oracle. Joan first encounters Leda Sprott at a séance in the Jordan Chapel, in an attempt to receive messages from the dead: the ultimate separation from self. Leda subsequently retreats from her former life as charletan soothsayer, "Leda Sprott owes a little money here and there," (L.O., 201), to the Reverend Eunice P. Revele, a minister of all denominations:

> I specialize in mixed marriages. I can do Jewish, Hindu, Catholic, five kinds of Protestant, Buddhist, Christian Scientist, agnostic, Supreme Being, any combination of these, or my own speciality. (L.O., 202)

The minor character of Leda Sprott indicates the duplicitous nature nature of life, as portrayed in Lady Oracle. Joan is not too surprised that Leda has become another person - that is the natural order of the universe, she is, however, suspicious of Leda's motives:

> Why had she used another name at the Jordan Chapel? But then, I thought, men who changed their names were likely to be con-men, criminals, undercover agents or magicians, whereas women who changed their names were probably just married. (L.O., 203)

Not even inanimate objects such as furniture and clothing are exempt from the duality of Atwood's universe:

> The gong sounded and Leda paced in, wearing a different robe, a purple one, trimmed in red velvet. I recognized the remains of the Jordan Chapel curtains and pulpit: times were evidently hard. (L.O., 203)

Joan projects the duplicitous nature of her world onto her art. One of the ways in which she escapes from herself is through the image of her Gothic heroines. Sometimes this escape into the artistic dream world is sufficient, yet sometimes it is not:

> It was true I had two lives, but on off days I felt that neither of them was completely real. With Arthur I was merely playing house, I wasn't really working at it. And my Costume Gothics were only paper; paper castles, paper costumes, paper dolls, as inert and lifeless finally as those unsatisfactory blank-eyed dolls I'd dressed and undressed in my mother's house.... (L.O., 216)

Joan's retreat from her external self is projected into her art, as her characters begin to multiply:

> Suddenly she found herself in the central plot. A stone bench ran along one side, and on it were seated four women. Two of them looked a lot like her, with red hair and green eyes and small white teeth.
> 'Who are you?' she asked.
> 'We are Lady Redmond,' said the middle-aged woman sadly.
> 'All of us,' the fat woman with the wings added.
> 'There must be some mistake,' said the first woman. 'I myself am Lady Redmond.'
> 'Oh, yes, we know,' said the second woman. 'But every man has more than one wife. Sometimes all at once, sometimes one at a time, sometimes one he doesn't even know about.' (L.O., 341)

Joan writes Costume Gothic romances as a means of escape from life; she becomes Louisa K. Delacourt since she assumed Louisa's role as a Romantic Novelist. But who are the recipients of Louisa's talent? Joan targets her texts at a very specific readership: women who

> ... got married too young, who had babies too early, who wanted princes and castles and ended up with cramped apartments and grudging husbands. (L.O., 95)

The readers who indulge in Joan's Gothics absorb the duplicitous themes like sponges, because the stories expose their own hidden identities: the Gothic readers become stand-ins for millions of dissatisfied, frustrated house-wives whose own high expectations have been rudely disillusioned in the real world:

> ... escape wasn't a luxury for them, it was a necessity. They had to get it somehow. And when they were too tired to invent escapes of their own, mine were available for them at the corner drugstore, neatly packaged like the other painkillers. They could be taken in capsule form, quickly and discreetly, during those moments when the hairdryer was stiffening the curls around their plastic rollers or the bath oil in the bath was turning their skins to pink velvet, leaving a ring in the tub to be removed later with Ajax cleanser, which would make their hands smell like a hospital and cause their husbands to remark that they were about as sexy as a dishcloth. Then they would mourn their lack of beauty, their departing youth.... (L.O., 34)

Joan's readers are housewives, of whom Joan explains:

> The heroines of my books were mere stand-ins: their features were never clearly defined, their faces were putty which each reader could reshape into her own, adding a little beauty. In hundreds of thousands of houses these hidden selves rose at night from the mundane beds of their owners to go forth on adventures so complicated and enticing that they couldn't be confessed to anyone, least of all to the husbands who lay snoring their enchanted snores and dabbling with nothing more recondite than a Playboy Bunny.... (L.O., 35)

Beyond the Gothic readers and people in her life, a leitmotif running throughout the text is that of the Fat Lady.

Joan's image of herself as the perpetual Fat Lady of the circus, walking the tight-rope, being the object of perpetual curiosity, is only

one of her lives, which is both reality and fantasy: she imposes her over-weight youth onto a fantasy figure whose image is one of ridicule and scorn. From a psychological point of view, she is externalizing her feelings of inferiority induced from lack of love and praise in childhood, especially by her mother.

A paradox exists in the disparity between that which Joan seeks in her fantasy life and the result of the retreat from herself. Linda Hutcheon, in her essay "From Poetic to Narrative Structures: The Novels of Margaret Atwood," tells us that the substitute worlds are seen as escapes, as wish-fulfilling improvements, that actually inhibit coming to terms with reality and with other people. [1]

The image of the Fat Lady is basically layered into three parts; firstly, Joan, the overweight child; secondly, Joan's early impression of the Fat Lady at the circus subsequently transferred to herself; thirdly, Joan's adult daydreams and fantasies of the Fat Lady juxtaposed with her own life.

The first image of the Fat Lady, that is, Joan herself as an actual obese child and adolescent, deals with the facts of her appearance as Joan perceives her mother of seeing them:

> I swelled visibly, relentlessly, before her very eyes, I rose like dough, my body advanced inch by inch towards her across the dining-room table, in this at least I was undefeated. I was five feet four and still growing, and I weighed a hundred and eighty-two pounds. (L.O., 70)

Joan's mother is never satisfied with her daughter; the reality of Joan's self is entirely unsatisfactory,

> Like most people she probably thought in images, and her image of me then must have been a one-holed object, like an inner tube, that took things in at one end but didn't let them out at the other: if she could somehow uncork me I would deflate, all at once, like a dirigible. (L.O., 87)

Joan reacts to her mother's rejection by deforming her own body to such an extent that she had the power to make her mother cry:

> Once, when I arrived home in a new lime-green car coat with toggles down the front, flashing like a neon melon, my mother started to cry. She cried hopelessly, passively; she was leaning against the banishter, her whole body slack as if she had no bones. My mother had never cried where I could see her and I was dismayed, but elated too at this evidence of my power, my only power. I had defeated her: I wouldn't ever let her make me over into her image, thin and beautiful. (L.O., 88)

This fascination soon wanes, however, as the process of change is over and she is now confronted with the static image of herself as a thin person:

> I longed to be fat again. It would be an insulation, a cocoon. Also it would be a disguise. I could be merely an onlooker again, with nothing too much expected of me. Without my magic cloak of blubber and invisibility I felt naked, pruned, as though some essential covering was missing. (L.O., 141)

The second series of Fat Lady images deals with the Fat Lady at the circus. This image merges with Joan's past as an overweight child in ballet costume,

> The problem was fairly simple: in the short pink skirt, with my waist, arms and legs exposed, I was grotesque, I am reconstructing this from the point of view of an adult ... it must have been like watching a decaying stripper ... According to the dirty postcards of the time, flesh was a virtue. (L.O., 46)

As a child, having been told of the freak show at the circus, Joan imagines what the Fat Lady looks like:

> I used to imagine the Fat Lady sitting on a chair, knitting, while lines and lines of thin grey faces filed past her, looking, looking. I saw her in gauze pants and a maroon satin brassiere, like the dancing girls, and red slippers. I thought about what she would feel. One day she would rebel, she would do something; meanwhile she made her living from their curiosity. She was knitting a scarf, for one of her relatives who had known her from a child and didn't find her strange at all. (L.O., 90)

Joan sits as a spectator, as one of the crowd observing the Fat Lady, the image externalized as a symbol of her own inner turmoil; like the Fat Lady, someday Joan, herself, will rebel. Joan dreams of the Fat Lady and imposes images of her own past upon her:

> In this one I was sitting in a circus tent. It was dark, something was about to happen, the audience was tense with expectation. I was eating popcorn. Suddenly a spotlight cut through the blackness and focused on a tiny platform at the top of the tent. Upon it stood the Fat Lady from the freak show at the Canadian National Exhibition. She was fatter than I had imagined her, fatter than the crude picture of her painted on the hoarding, much fatter than me. She was wearing pink tights with spangles, a short fluffy pink skirt, satin ballet slippers and, on her head, a sparkling tiara. She carried a diminutive pink umbrella; this was a substitute for the wings which I longed to pin on her. Even in my fantasies I remained faithful to a few ground rules of reality. (L.O., 102)

Joan equates dancing girls with the Fat Lady, an image later to be developed as one and the same, and even later, as herself:

> Nevertheless, the Fat Lady was in that tent and I wanted to see her; but I never did. What I couldn't remember was this: were there two tents, or was there only one? The man with the megaphone sounded the same for freaks and dancing girls alike. They were both spectacular, something

that had to be seen to be believed. (L.O., 90)

The third section of Fat Lady images deals with Joan's past and present coming together; in this sequence, she exists as a thin adult, yet some memory from the past triggers back her own fat image. She usually invokes her fat past as a means of escaping some present event with which she cannot cope, for example, when she meets her childhood friend years later:

> Wads of fat sprouted on my thighs and shoulders, my belly bulged out like a Hubbard squash, a brown wool beret popped through my scalp, bloomers coated by panic-stricken loins. Tears swelled behind my eyes. Like a virus meeting an exhausted throat, my dormant past burst into rank life. (L.O., 229)

After having published her first serious novel, her past begins to intrude into her present and,

> My old daydreams about the Fat Lady returned, only this time she'd be walking across her tightrope, in her pink tutu, and she'd fall, in slow motion, turning over and over on the way down ... Or she'd be dancing on a stage in her harem costume and her red slippers. But it wouldn't be a dance at all, it would be a striptease, she'd start taking off her clothes, while I watched, powerless to stop her. She'd wobble her hips, removing her veils, one after another, but no one would whistle, no one would yell 'Take it off baby.' I tried to turn off these out-of-control fantasies, but couldn't, I had to watch them through to the end. (L.O., 251)

When Joan finally makes the decision to tell her husband about her various segregated lives, her past comes back to haunt her, but as an escape from dealing with the truth,

> The Fat Lady skated out onto the ice. I couldn't help myself, It was one of the most important moments in my life, I should have been able to keep

> her away, but out she came in pink skating costume, her head ornamented with swan's down. With her was the thinnest man in the world. She smiled at the crowd, nobody smiled back, they didn't believe what they were seeing because she was twirling around the rink with exceptional grace, spinning like a top on her tiny feet, then the thin man lifted her and threw her and she floated up, up, she hung suspended ... her secret was that although she was so large, she was very light, she was hollow, like a helium baloon, they had to keep her tethered to her bed or she'd drift away, all night she strained at the ropes. (L.O., 273)

Joan does, in fact, become so terrified of confronting the multiple layers of herself, that she imagines the Fat Lady being killed, as she is sure that she would be killed if she ever merged her separate parts:

> ... the Fat Lady kicked her skates feebly; her thighs and the hugh moon of her rump were visible. Really it was an outrage. They've gone for the harpoon gun, I heard the commentator say. They were going to shoot her down in cold blood, explode her, despite the fact that she had now burst into song.... (L.O., 274)

When she is in Italy, and people begin to suspect her, and her various lives threaten to merge into one, she again invokes the Fat Lady as a means of avoidance and of escape:

> It was the Fat Lady. She rose into the air and descended on me as I lay stretched out in the chair. For a moment she hovered around me like ectoplasm like a gelatin shell, my ghost, my angel; then she settled and I was absorbed into her. Within my former body, I gasped for air. Disgusted, concealed, white fur choaking my nose and mouth. Obliterated. (L.O., 321)

The ultimate invasion of the Fat Lady into Joan's life occurs in her art, when she is unable to write a Costume Gothic without the Fat Lady assuming a role as one of her characters:

> The shrubberies stirred and a figure stepped out from them, blocking his path. It was an enormously fat woman dressed in a sopping-wet blue velvet gown, cut low on the bosom; her breasts rose from the bodice like two full-moons. Damp strands of hair straggled down her bloated face like trickles of blood.
> 'Redmond, don't you know me?' the woman said in a throaty voice which, he recognized with horror, was Felicia's. (L.O., 322)

The Fat Lady image is such an integral part of Joan's life, that it includes even her art.

It is clear from this brief examination of images of hidden identity in Lady Oracle that they are central in exemplifying the theme of Atwood's text: the duplicity of life and the subsequent retreat from self.

IV.1. DEATH IMAGES

For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.

Genesis iii: 19

The preceding examination of Kamouraska and Lady Oracle dealt primarily with the two novels from the large macro perspective of images of division in general. We will now examine specific images from both novels from the perspective of the smaller micro level. From this micro-analysis we will attempt to find parallel images of division depicting a retreat from self in both novels.

In the narrative structure, Hébert's protagonist faces death firstly, in a concrete manner, through Monsieur Rolland's sickness and, secondly, in an internal, spiritual manner as she evokes ghosts from the past. Elisabeth is obsessed with death since she is facing the demise of her husband; indeed, it it this very image of impending death that leads Elisabeth down the path of psychotic memories and an hallucinatory perception of her past.

Jérôme Rolland, Elisabeth's respectable husband of eighteen years, slowly drifts towards the realm of the dead, and all the fear and terror shrouding this world of the unknown is manifest in images of the past, represented in Elisabeth's mind by feelings of guilt and of failure. As Elisabeth comes closer to Jérôme's death, the ultimate separation from self, she confronts the lie of her marriage, she faces the truth that she has been trying to prove her innocence all those years by negating the truth, by appearing to be the perfect wife and mother. It is only on his deathbed that Jérôme lets her know that she has never fooled him.

To the bitter end, Elisabeth retreats from her guilt by appearing to be the dutiful wife:

> Ne plus quitter jérôme Rolland de l'oeil, le veiller comme le mystère même de la vie et de la mort. Surprendre la main de Dieu saisissant sa proie, rassurer cette pauvre proie humaine. Etre vigilante jusqu'à l'extrême limite de l'attention. Accèder à l'ombre du moindre désir de cet homme. Etre-là. L'assurer de la miséricorde de Dieu. Montrer un visage de paix, sur notre visage réconcilié. L'innocence étalée comme la peau sur les os. (K., 35)

Through the use of interior monologue, Elisabeth is able to express that which she perceives her husband to be thinking as he looks upon her:

> M. Rolland voit une image triomphante s'avancer dans la glace. Sa femme lui apparaît telle qu'en lui-même se dresse la mort, transfigurée, tout au long des nuits de cauchemars. (K., 14)

Elisabeth, disliking this image of herself as Death personified, evokes a more satisfying image of what she would like people to be saying of her to her husband,

> Quelle femme admirable vous avez, monsieur Rolland. Huit enfants et une maison si bien tenue. Et puis voici que depuis que vous êtes malade la pauvre Elisabeth ne sort plus. Elle ne quitte pas votre chevet. Quelle créature dévouée et attentive, une vraie sainte, monsieur Rolland. Et jolie avec ca, une princesse. L'âge, le malheur et le crime ont passé sur votre épouse comme de l'eau sur le dos d'un canard. (K., 15)

The reality of the situation occurs to Elisabeth as she and her husband engage in a dialogue in which they tell each other the truth of the own emotions:

> -Elisabeth, tu es eu bien chance de m'épouser, n'est-ce pas?
> La voix blanche, sans vibration, d'Elisabeth.
> -Jérôme, sans toi, j'étais libre et je refaisais ma vie, comme on retourne un manteau usé.
> Moins qu'une passe d'armes, deux coups parfaits,

> droits et justes. La vérité atteinte. La pointe du coeur touchée, dans un chuchotemement d'alcôve. Face à la mort qui vient. (K., 36)

The impending death of Elisabeth's husband jolts her memory (an extremely subjective memory) and she associates the image of death with her first husband who, portrayed through her retrospective, subjective eyes, was obsessed with his own death, his own separation from self.

Antoine's split personality is represented by his psychotic madness as he is a raving lunatic one moment and a quiet, repentent, loving man the next. We are confronted by numerous instances of his toying with death and his obsession with the idea of dying, of being ultimately separated from himself:

> -Me tuer. Je vais me tuer. Il faut que je me tue. Tu sais bien qu'il le faut. Il n'y a que cela à faire. Me tuer. Elisabeth, je vais me tuer. (K., 86)

Antoine torments his wife with threats of killing them both together, as he delights himself in fantasy images of death:

> -Tu viens, Elisabeth? J'agrandis le noeud coulant et tu viens avec moi. Te balancer au bout de la corde. Deux époux pendus ensemble, dans un même noeud de corde. (K., 87)

Throughout the text Antoine threatens to kill himself, violently and passionately, as his madness progresses,

> -Je retournerai dans le bas du fleuve, sur mes terres. On me saluera bien bas. Puis je me tuerai. Elisabeth, tu m'entends? Je vais me tuer. Sur la grève de Kamouraska. (K., 101)

Elisabeth dreams of Antoine, murdered, lying dead, multiplied into several persons; she perceives of his death as the way in which he has

described his own death fantasies:

> L'image d'Antoine tué va s'abattre sur moi. Me terrasser, Soudain ... Mon épaule de pierre. Le géant se brise contre elle. Vole ~~en~~ éclats. Envahit tout mon être. Des milliers d'épines dans ma chair. Je suis hantée, jusqu'à la racine de mes cheveux, la pointe de mes ongles. Antoine multiplié à l'infini, comme écrasé au pilon, réduit en fines particules ... Une ronde dans mes os, une multitude d'Antoines assassinés circule dans mes os. (K., 92)

Antoine's madness and obsession with death haunt Elisabeth, even after he is dead; when she is forced to participate in the reenactment of the crime, she confuses the reality of the situation with visions of Antoine's subterranean phantom come back to haunt her. Elisabeth's retreat into the world of the dark unknown evinces a further retreat from herself, as she is unable to confront the reality of her having been an accomplice to her husband's murder, at least not in front of all those people. Elisabeth evokes images of Antoine's evil side, reminiscent of Grendel's mother, lurking in the watery grave of the underworld,

> Antoine se lève en secret. Suit des couloirs sous terre. Des chemins noirs là où passent les eaux souterraines. Arrive aux ruines du manoir. S'assoit dans son fauteuil ... qu'il attend sa femme. Il gémit encore. Dit que son mauvais caractère est mort, en même temps que son sang ... proclame que tout est prêt pour la reconstitution. (K., 81)

In this image, Elisabeth imagines that Antoine's evil side, his nasty temper, is gone; he is cleansed, but only through death.

Hébert draws upon her knowledge of folkloric belief as she personifies Death: Elisabeth, while waiting for her husband to die, hears a horse-drawn wagon racing through the night coming closer and closer to her home; she fears that Death is coming to take her away:

> On attend, au loin, le pas lourd d'un cheval traînant une charrette. Il est deux heures du matin. Que peut bien faire cette charette dans le désert de la nuit? Depuis quelque temps on rôde dans la ville. La charrette se rapproche. Rue Saint-Louis, rue de Jardins, rue Donocona. Silence. Ah mon Dieu! Les roues cerclées de fer tournent à angle droit, les sabots pesants et fatigués se rapprochent. Cheval et voiture vont déboucher, d'un instant à l'autre, sous mes fenêtres. C'est pour moi que l'on vient! Je suis sûre que c'est pour moi. (K., 12)

The image of the spectral carriage symbolizing approaching Death is a well-known belief of legend of Brittany and, evidently, deeply embedded in the psyche of Hébert's Élisabeth.

From this brief examination of death images in Kamouraska, the evidence suggests the theme of Hébert's text: the retreat from self. We will now examine Atwood's text from a similar micro-analysis in order to understand the way in which images of death manifest themselves as images of division.

Death, the ultimate separation from self, is a dominant motif running through Lady Oracle. Joan's obsession with images and her subsequent retreat from self is depicted by Atwood also, through the use of death symbolism and imagery.

Atwood's use of death imagery evinces a symmetrical order of presentation. This order is most obvious in the recurring image of dead people's clothes. Firstly, Joan learns to equate the finality of death with the removal of the clothes of the deceased; when her Aunt Lou dies, clothes disappear along with the body:

> I saw my Aunt Lou disappearing, piece by piece, into the brown paper bag which was swallowing her endlessly, her breezy clothes, her gay scarves and

> follies, her jokes about herself which my mother took seriously (that magenta blouse, for instance) and I couldn't stand it. (L.O., 119)

And later, when her mother dies, her father removes all of her mother's clothes:

> He'd already given my mother's clothes to the Crippled Civilians ... (L.O., 178)

These two deaths and the associations of the removal of the clothes of the dead leaves a deep impression on Joan, an impression which later surfaces in Joan's own life when she plans her false death; the presence of this association between the dead and the destruction of the clothes of the dead is the second step in Atwood's three-part symmetrical order of death imagery. Joan calls her clothers 'my funerary costume,'

> They smelled of my death, of Lake Ontario, spilled oil, dead gulls, tiny silver fish cast up on the beach and rotting. Jeans and a navy-blue T-shirt, my funerary costume, my former self, damp and collapsed, from which the many-colored souls had flown. (L.O., 19)

Atwood uses the symbolism of the burial of clothes as an analogy to the burial of a body; the fact that protagonist Joan buries her own clothes while not being dead, neatly ties together the image of death with Atwood's thematic concept of a duplicitous universe:

> The clothes were my own, I hadn't done anything wrong, but I felt as though I was getting rid of a body, the corpse of someone I'd killed. (L.O., 20)

The fact that Joan is not dead, however, is a significant one, as Atwood suggests that total separation from self is only possible in death; tidy as Joan tries to be,

> They found my dress, though, in the bow ... (L.O., 338)

Her dress still exists, hence symbolizing her own existence.

The third instance of symmetrical order in death imagery occurs when Joan transposes her notion of the destruction of a person's clothes with their death into her art; she admits,

> Bad things always happened to the clothes of my heroines: bottles of ink got poured over them, holes were burned in them, they got thrown out of windows, shredded, ripped. In **The Turrets of Tantripp** someone stuffed them full of hay, like a scarecrow or a voodoo effigy, and floated them down a river. Once they were buried in a cellar. (L.O., 132)

Atwood's discussion of clothes in the Gothic section reveals her conscious use of the folkloric belief that, in general, whatever belongs to a person may be considered part of that person, so that the destiny of these parts, whether the result of magic or natural causes, may involve the person.

The Gothic Romance that Joan writes throughout the text describes the cutting up and subsequent disposing of her heroine's dress:

> But when she opened the door of her bedroom, it was all she could do to keep from uttering a scream. There, spread out on her bed, was her good black silk dress, viciously slashed to ribbons. Great gashes had been cut into the skirt, the bodice had been mutilated beyond repair, the sleeves were in shreds. (L.O., 130)

The heroines in Joan's novels, however, do not die, they face danger but are eventually rescued. Joan longs to be rescued from danger and potential death:

> I loved the simplicity of that world, where happiness was possible and wounds were only ritual ones. Why had I been closed out from the impossible white paradise where love was as final as death, and banished to this other place where everything changed and shifted? (L.O., 284)

Joan's knowledge of death occurs, firstly, by the deaths of her mother and her aunt and, secondly, in the religious doctrine of the Spiritualists, a hymnbook of which Joan recalls:

> One was about a joyous boat ride across a river to the Other Side, where loved ones were awaiting. The other was about the blessed spirits of those who've gone before, watching o'er us for our safety till we reach the other shore. (L.O., 106)

As Joan learns the doctrine of the Spiritualists, she questions the validity of the philosophy:

> I even spent a certain amount of time worrying about the Spiritualist doctrines: if the Other Side was so wonderful, why did the spirits devote most of their messages to warnings? Instead of telling their loved ones to avoid slippery stairs and unsafe cars and starchy foods, they should have been luring them over cliffs and bridges and into lakes, spurring them on to greater feats of intemperance and gluttony, in order to hasten their passage to the brighter shore. Some of the Spiritualists also believed in multiple incarnations, and some in Atlantis. (L.O., 110)

Despite Joan's reservations, she herself decided to embark on a quest for the Other Side, as she retreats from self through a contrived death.

The place where everything changes and shifts is the self-inflicted never-never land into which Joan chooses to retreat after having staged her own death. Joan despises her life in Italy, the Other Side, a limbo-land where whe is dead and not dead:

> The Other Side was no paradise, it was a limbo. Now I knew why the dead came back to watch over the living: the Other Side was boring. There was no one to talk to and nothing to do. (L.O., 309)

The realization that she does not like the Other Side, the pseudo-separation from self by death, she laments the life from which she retreated:

> ... I began to cry. I closed my eyes: there in front of me, across the immense stretch of blue which I recognized as the Atlantic Ocean, was everyone I had left on the Other Side. (L.O., 8)

Joan wishes to be with her husband Arthur again, in the real world; the image of a glamourous death becomes a sham as the reality of the tediousness of limboland reaches Joan:

> ... Arthur had been with me, he wasn't with me now, we had been walking along a street this one and then the future had swept over us and we were separated. He was in the distance now, across the ocean, on a beach, the wind ruffling his hair, I could hardly see his features. He was moving at an ever-increasing speed away from me, into the land of the dead, the dead past, irretrievable. (L.O., 134)

Joan is a coward at heart: she likes the idea of total separation from self through death, yet she is too afraid of the unknown of the real Other Side,

> It was my own stupidity, my own fault. I should have gone to Tunisia or the Canary Islands or even Miami beach, on the Greyhound Bus, motel included, but I didn't have the willpower; I needed something more familiar. A place with no handholds, no landmarks, no past at all: that would have been too much like dying. (L.O., 11)

Joan faces even the unknown of an imitation Other Side, equating this

limbo space with Miami beach; to Joan, death itself is an image, a means of moving into another life through forgery:

> Well, I thought, maybe I really did want to die or I wouldn't have pretended to do it. But that was wrong; I pretended to die so I could live, so I could have another life. (L.O., 315)

Again, Joan's perceptions of life are imposed upon her art; the heroines of her novel admit, via the omniscient third person narrative of Joan, her fear of death,

> All she wanted was happiness with the man she loved. It was this one impossible wish that had ruined her life; she ought to have settled for contentment, for the usual life. (L.O., 319)

Atwood brings together the images of the mirror and the window to unite with the image of death, when thematically Joan separates from herself as a means of separating from her mother:

> She had been the lady in the boat, the death barge, the tragic lady with the flowing hair and stricken eyes, the lady in the tower. She couldn't stand the view from the window, life was her curse. How could I renounce her? She needed her freedom also; she had been my relfection too long. What was the charm, what would set her free? (L.O., 330)

Joan will never be free as long as her mother is dead, hence escape from self will never cease. Despite Joan's feeble assertion at the end of her story, 'I won't write any more Costume Gothics ...,' (L.O., 345) Atwood knits together a neat unity of infinity of theme as Joan's first words begin,

> I planned my death carefully; unlike my life, which meandered along from one thing to another, despite my feeble attempts to control it ... I wanted my death, by comparison, to be neat and simple ... (L.O., 7)

and Joan's last words read,

> I don't think I'll ever be a very tidy person. (L.O., 345)

Joan's story of her retreat from self, the structure of closure suggests, has just begun.

IV. 2. VAMPIRE IMAGE

I'd allowed myself to be cut in two. Woman sawn apart in a wooden crate, wearing a bathing suit, done with mirrors, I read it in a comic book, only with me there had been an accident and I came apart. The other half, the one locked away, was the only one that could live; I was the wrong half, detached, terminal. I was nothing but a head, or no, something minor like a severed thumb; numb.

Margaret Atwood, Surfacing

The vampire image is evident in both Kamouraska and Lady Oracle as a further device evincing duality and separation from self. The Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend defines vampire as:

> One of the types of the undead: a living corpse or soulless body that comes from its burial place and drinks the blood of the living.[1]

It is not surprising that Hébert and Atwood would both incorporate the image of the vampire into their texts. Atwood treats the image differently than Hébert. The vampire image, in Atwood's universe, is part of a collective, humorous folkloric mythology. In Hébert's world however, the vampire image is feared. The world in which Elisabeth exists (Québec in the eighteen-forties) is dominated by folkloric beliefs and the Holy Roman Catholic Church.[2] According to folklore, persons who turn into vampires are generally wizards, suicides and those who have come to a violent end or have been cursed by their parents or by the church. As an accomplice to the murder of her husband, Elisabeth's internal guilt and subsequent fear that she has been damned by the Church are externalized as she alternates in her dream state between lucidity and the psychotic: her knowledge of the folklore of the vampire is manifest in her perception of her long-lost love, George Nelson:

> Un instant, une figure d'homme rougie par le froid se tourne vers moi. Est-ce moi qu'il regarde, cet homme? Sa lèvre supérieure se retrousse. Un sourire équivoque pareil à celui des morts. Ses dents. Je n'avais jamais remarqué comme les canines de chaque côté sont fortes et longues. Lui donnent un air de bête sauvage. Ce n'est que la peur qui brouille mon regard. Abime l'image de mon amour. (K., 205)

There is a suggestion of lycanthropy, a belief deeply embedded into the psyche of Old Québec; often the vampire and the werewolf would be linked together; the former representing the dead come to life, the latter representing the beastly side of a person. In Hébert's Kamouraska several images of vampires and werewolves suggest themselves as part of the psychology of the time and space of Elisabeth's world. Elisabeth's fate may be said to be part of the folkloric tradition of one who loves unwisely. The image of the vampire imposed upon this ill-fated love is similar to that of the werewolf in Marie de France's Bisclavret (The Lay of the Bisclavret). Certainly Hébert is aware of the Christian concept of the dual nature of man (the body and the soul) [3] and, as Bisclavret reveals, man's having to suffer refining fires in order to conquer the evil desires of the flesh. Elisabeth chooses, like Emma Bovary, for example, to indulge in adultery, and in the world of her own psyche, has failed God's test. Hence, Elisabeth retreats into perceptions of God's retribution in the form of a haunting by her lover as a vampire.

Atwood's vampire, however, is much less sinister, much more down-to-earth. She projects the vampire image upon her lover, the Polish Count, but the image is satiric, not fearful:

> I imagined him as a tall man, very tall, in a black suit, heaving up out of the snow like an avalanche in reverse, blue-faced and covered with ice, red-eyed, hairy-headed, with long sharp teeth like icicles. (L.O., 60)

The Royal Porcupine, like the Polish Count, is equated with a vampire, so much so that Joan decides to have an affair with him because he reminds her of the vampire image:

> Also I found him attractive. Him or the cape, I wasn't sure which.... (L.O., 239)

The Royal Porcupine, like Hébert's Doctor Nelson, is also associated with the werewolf in images of the man/beast.

Joan's knowledge of the vampire image, deeply embedded within the realms of her unconscious psyche, manifests itself in her less serious writing, her Costume Gothics. The Gothic heroine Charlotte envisions the figure of a man whose description is vampiric. True to folkloric standards of the behaviour of vampires, the figure appears at night, softly calling her name, attempting to lure her into danger:

> She'd been in the bedroom, and she'd heard a sound ... a sound that came from outside, below, on the terrace ... the sound of footsteps ... and then, surely she was not mistaken the sound of someone calling her name. An icy tremor of fear shot through her. She arose and went to the window. There, below her, clearly visible in the eerie light from the moon, which has just appeared from behind a wisp of gauzy cloud, stood a figure ... a figure swathed in a dark cloak, its features concealed. (L.O., 187)

The ambiguity of the identity of this vampire image evinces a duplicity of life inherent in Atwood's theme; is the swathed figure Charlotte's rescuer or a villain? The answer is always open-ended. As a vampiric image, the figure is not designated with the pronoun of "him," rather the figure is called "it," reinforcing the notion of the figure of the un-dead.

The treatment of female vampires, on the other hand, leaves no doubt as to the identity of the woman, the authorial intrusions (highly contrived in keeping with the structure of the Costume Gothic), state

clearly that the woman vampire is an animal on the prowl in search of victims:

> Outside the drawing-room Charlotte paused in amazement. At the foot of the stairs, blocking her way, stood a tall woman in a sable travelling cloak. The hood was thrown back, revealing flame-red hair; the bodice of her scarlet dress was cut low, displaying the swell of her white breasts. It was evident that the skill of Bond Street's most fashionable and most expensive dressmakers had been lavished on her costume; yet beneath this veneer of civilized sophistication her body moved with the sensuousness of a predatory animal. She was ravishingly beautiful. (L.O., 31)

Fictitious Gothic creatures and real people in Joan's life all reveal vampiric elements in their personalities; it is no surprise, therefore, that Joan projects a vampiric quality onto inanimate objects:

> All the things I saw and coveted had been seen and coveted previously, they had passed through several lives and were destined to pass through several more, becoming more worn but also more valuable, harder and more brilliant, as if they had absorbed their owner's sufferings and fed on them. How difficult these objects are to dispose of, I thought; they lurk passively, like vampire sheep, waiting for someone to buy them. (L.O., 160)

These objects feed on the lives of their owners; the sinister vampiric side of seemingly harmless objects is hidden, in the guise of harmless sheep. Though the analogy appears extreme, the fact remains that the objects survive while generations of people have died; this analogy reveals the duplicity of life through separation by death.

Many beliefs of folklore have been employed by Hébert and Atwood as integral devices to suggest their theme. Bram Stoker's well-known Dracula, for example, is based on the legend of the vampire from folklore. Atwood's readers understand the sinister side of the heroes and heroines she parodies through the

allusion to vampires. The same understanding applies to Hébert's readers; because of the setting of Hébert's novel, knowledge of lycanthropy is also well-known as part of the folkloric legends of Old Québec and of Acadia; these legends of werewolves co-existed, in many cases with those of vampires.

What Hébert and Atwood have done is taken some well-known beliefs from folklore and skilfully interwoven these beliefs into their novels, hence images from superstitious legends have been used to depict a retreat from self and from life.

IV. 3. SHADOW IMAGE

Mes mains écartent le
jour comme un rideau
L'ombre d'un seul arbre
étale la nuit à nos pieds.

Anne Hébert, Poèms

Beware lest you lose the substance by grasping at your shadow

Aesop

The shadow image maintains a respectable position in such diverse areas as Jungian philosophy and Ancient Chinese folklore. In his overview of the motif, M. Dimic explains that Jung postulated two dimensions of the unconscious, the personal and the collective, thereby defining the shadow as one of the essential archetypes, i.e. images, patterns and symbols that are seen in dreams or fantasies and that appear as themes in mythology, religion and fairy-tales. In contrast to the light of consciousness, the shadow is the darkness of the personal unconscious, the other, unfathomed side of the personality, its secret sharer. The shadow includes those sombre traits belonging to the same sex and is representative of the least-developed, inferior function of Jung's four types of consciousness (thinking, feeling, perceiving and intuiting); the shadow is everything which the individual refuses to accept or understand in himself, in spite of the fact that these traits present themselves with persistence, directly or indirectly, in dreams, unguarded words and impulsive actions. If not assumed and integrated, the shadow may become evil and destructive. In the collective unconscious, the shadow represents archetypal evil; referring to gnostic and alchemic lore, Jung extends this analysis to God or Christ and Satan. For him, in myth, one of the antagonistic brothers or twins is a shadow symbol; in folktales this is, among others, the function of serpents and dragons.

Dimic goes on to explain that the Chinese philosophy of **Yin** and **Yang** is based on the belief that the side of the valley which is covered

by clouds and in the shade is juxtaposed with the side of the valley which is exposed to sunshine, this belief later having been developed to include all the major polarities of life and the universe. In a broad symbolic sense, as the sun is the light of the spirit, so the shadow is the negative double of the body, the image of its wicked and base side. [1]

The shadow image is associated with the unsubstantial, the counterfeit and the unreal; the shadow of one's former self, much weakened or emaciated. According to folkloric belief, a person's shadow or reflected image is often equated with his life-essence, strength or soul. [2]

The shadow image is exemplified in literary tradition by Anderson's The Shadow. The Shadow represents man's internal dualistic propensity for good versus evil which is externalized when a good man is separated from his shadow, the latter of which returns and destroys the man. This image of the shadow is evident in both Hébert and Atwood as a vehicle for depicting the dualist nature of the universe.

In Kamouraska, the shadow image, in keeping with folkloric tradition, is associated with the sinister. Aurélie Caron is predominately associated with the shadow image; she herself becomes a kind of shadow, living her life through her mistress Elisabeth. Aurélie's depiction as a kind of sinister shadow image symbolizes the demented and destructive love affair between George Nelson and Elisabeth; Aurélie is persuaded to carry out the evil deeds that Elisabeth wants done but does not want to do herself. Critic Lucille Roy in her work

Entre la Lumière et l'ombre provides a perceptive argument of Aurélie's role as shadow:

> Aurélie est fille de l'enfer, voire de cet envers du monde situé dans l'abime marin de la terre. Obscure et abyssale, elle s'attache à l'ombre d'Elisaeth, se cache et s'engouffre, disparaissant comme une sorcière. Dans l'esprit angoissé de l'heroine, le nom même d'Aurélie Caron écume du fond de l'eau croupie, comme une arme rouillée, pour la tuer. Les liens d'Aurélie avec les profondeurs sombres et humides de la terre sont une manace constante. Son teint est d'une pâleur livide, lunaire, nocturne, témoin de sa captivité dans des lieux morlets, obscurs et clos. La glaise qu'elle traine sur ses pieds ainsi que la noirceur de sa chevelure indiquent toutes deux la profondeur nocturne et terrestre de ses origines. 3

Aurélie's nocturnal, underground shadowy image is manifest in her appearance after having served time in prison for Elisabeth's crime:

> Son visage, son cou, ses bras nus sont d'une blancheur livide de champignons frais.
> -Comme tu es pâle, Aurélie.
> -J'ai toujours eu un teint de prisonnière, Madame sait bien.
> Un vrai pressentiment. (K., 61)

Aurélie, Elisabeth's shadow, pays the price for Elisabeth's crime. Roy argues that like Prometheus, it is Aurélie, not Elisabeth who goes through the fire in Kamouraska:

> Remarquons pourtant que cette chevelure noir est auréolée d'épines roussies, symbole de la flamme qui habite et anime Aurélie au début à la fin de l'oeuvre. Véritable Prométhée, ce n'est pas Elisabeth ... mais sa servante qui entretient le feu dans kamouraska. Elle en est la maitresse, l'incarnation même. 4

Aurélie chooses to become Elisabeth's shadow, negating her own life to live through that of Elisabeth,

> Aurélie ne fréquente plus aucun mauvais garcon. Ne fait plus aucune prophétie sur la vie des nouveaunés. Elle ne sort plus du tout. S'attache à mes pas. Ne semble vivre que lorsque je lui confie quelque message pour George. S'épanouit tout à fait, vibre et frémit, lorsque je lui raconte ma peine ou ma joie. Je lis sur son visage une admiration sans borne. Un étonnement sans limite. Une sorte d'envoûtement. On pourrait croire que ma propre existence tumultueuse suffit désormais à Aurélie. La dispense de vivre elle-même. (K., 172)

Elisabeth's shadow, Aurélie, haunts her throughout her life, never letting her forget her evil side.

Aurélie's separation from self is induced by Elisabeth. Elisabeth lulls Aurélie into a false sense of security by making her stare into the fire and think of her potential life as a real lady of means, just like Elisabeth: all she need do is commit murder. As the scene progresses, and Elisabeth's evil suggestions are spoken, their sinister shadows bounce around the room as the fire burns brightly:

> Je fais asseoir Aurélie par terre, à côté de moi. Face au feu. Après avoir soufflé toutes les bougies. Une à une, cérémonieusement. La luer de feu seule éclaire la pièce. Nos ombres sur le mur. Nous tendons nos mains vers le feu. (K., 172)

As the fire dies, the flames are extinguished, hence the shadows disappear. Aurélie, obtaining some sense of self, has attacks of conscience and begins to cry:

> Aurélie baisse la tête. Regarde fixement le foyer éteint. Pleure silencieusement. Sans bouger. Comme si ce flot de larmes qui mouille son châle ne lui appartenait déjà plus. (K.,,176)

Aurélie laments the division of her soul; she recognizes that all she is is a shadow, yet even her tears are described as being detached from her.

This brief analysis of the shadow image in Kamouraska supports the argument that Hébert is using many beliefs from folklore as a means of depicting the theme of a retreat from self. Hébert's oeuvres, in general, reveal a poetic usage of symbols and images as, for example, a similar use of shadows in Les Chambres de bois, in which protagonist Catherine is haunted throughout by shadows from her past. At any rate, the use of the shadow image in Kamouraska is masterfully rendered, revealing the dualistic nature of man.

Atwood's protagonist Joan displays Jungian traits of the suppressed unconscious. Joan's retreat from self is manifest in the shadow image, exemplifying everything that Joan refuses to accept or understand in herself. Joan refuses to acknowledge the darker side of her personality and denies the integration of her shadow, choosing instead to falsify death and split herself from her shadowy other self:

> The trick was to vanish without a trace, leaving behind me the shadow of a corpse, a shadow everyone would mistake for solid reality. At first I thought I'd managed it. (L.O., 7)

Consistent with Jungian explications of the shadow image, as Joan rejects the totality of her separate parts, thus negating the integration of her shadow, the shadow in Lady Oracle associates itself with evil and destruction.

Joan's retreat from self is rooted in her mother's relationship with her daughter. Images of the shadow depicting duplicity and foreboding are evident in the character of Joan's mother, from a simple act of putting on her face,

> ... her lips were thin but she drew a larger mouth with lipstick over and around them, like Bette Davis, which gave her a curious double mouth, the real one showing through the false one like a shadow.... (L.O., 68)

to a more complex deep-rooted psychological images of paranoia, as Joan imagines the shadow of her dead mother sitting, waiting to take her to the other side:

> It was irrational, but I had the feeling that there was someone inside the flat, sitting in the chair by the window, waiting for me. (L.O., 28)

Joan's suppression of her shadowy side, her fear of becoming like her mother, is a leitmotif embedded throughout Atwood's text as a key vehicle depicting a retreat from self.

When Joan secures the Louisa K. Delacourt documentation, thereby actually becoming two separate people, she uses the shadow image to describe her double life:

> This was the beginning of my double life. But hadn't my life always been double? There was always that shadowy twin, thin when I was fat, fat when I was thin, myself in silvery negative, with dark teeth and shining white pupils glowing in the back sunlight of that other world. While I watched, locked in the actual flesh, the uninteresting dust and never emptied ashtrays of daily life. It was never-never land she wanted, that reckless twin. (L.O., 246)

Joan's image as an overweight teenager, forever embalmed in a photograph is again equated with the shadow image; Joan lies to her husband, and the part of her past she will not admit to, symbolizes the negation of her unintegrated shadow. Disaster could only follow as a result of this division:

> What lies I'd told him and it wasn't just in self-defense: already I'd devised an entire spurious past for this shadow on a piece of paper, this woman of no discernible age who stood squinting at the camera, holding a cone of pink spun sugar, her face puffed and empty as a mongoloid idiot's: my own shucked-off body. (L.O., 91)

Joan's fear that her shadow could re-appear at anytime and take over manifests itself in her inability to commit herself in a mature manner to a love relationship. She justifies her unhappiness as a normal part of life, yet she refuses to integrate her various selves, hence her shadow does take over:

> At that moment it seemed to me impossible that anyone could ever really love anyone, or if they could, that anything lasting or fine would come out of it. Love was the pursuit of shadows, and I was a shadow for Paul, doomed to flee before him, evanescent as a cloud ... I was not the same as my phantom. (L.O., 283)

Joan is not the same as her shadow image. Joan remembers having studied poetry as a child and the boy's laughter at the allusion to menstruation; her anger and fear at the potential amalgamation of herself and her shadow are symbolized in some lines of a poem she quotes from The Lady of Shalott:

> I am half-sick of shadows, said
> The Lady of Small Onion ...
> The Curse is come upon me, cried
> The Lady of Shalott. (L.O., 143)

Joan, like the Lady of Shalott, is half-sick of shadows. Like the heroine in The Lady of Shalott, Joan's alter-ego does not escape from the sinister shadow image; as Penelope is forced to go into the mirror, her reflection disappears, and is surrounded by shadows:

> Penelope felt an aura of evil gather in the room; it grew thick around her. Despite herself, she felt her gaze being drawn to the flame; her mind fluttered, fascinated, helpless as a moth, her own reflection disappeared ... further into the mirror she went, and further, till she seemed to be walking on the other side of the glass, in a land of indistinct shadows. (L.O., 218)

The threatening unsubstantial shadows that Penelope faces become sinister substantial shadows to Gothic heroine Charlotte, as she is menaced by a man, and she hides:

> There were footsteps behind her. She shrank into the shade of a tree, hoping to escape notice, but a shadow loomed against the setting sun, there was a hand on her arm, and a voice, hoarse with passion, breathed her name.... (L.O., 164)

Penelope's shadow betrays her and leaves her open to danger; the shadow represents both separation and destruction.

The shadow image is an effective tool with which Atwood carves out a picture of duality, exemplifying the Yang side, the dark side of life, in opposition with the Yin side, the light side, essentially the good versus the evil.

Atwood's use of folkloric images, like that of Hébert, is a conscious structure, part of the poetic perspective from which they both write, especially in dealing with the aspect of the Gothic where legends and beliefs from an oral past abound. Both novelists incorporate the folkloric images out of a well-known literary tradition. It is a tradition especially rooted in the psychology of the nineteenth century Gothic novel, especially in English, for example, the Brontes Wuthering Heights and Jane Eyre, novels in which images such as death, shadows and vampires and werewolves abound.

IV. 4. MIRROR IMAGE

Tricks with Mirrors

i

It's no coincidence
this is a used
furniture warehouse

I enter with you
and become a mirror

Mirrors
are the perfect lovers,

that's it, carry me up the stairs
by the edges, don't drop me,

that would be bad luck
throw me on the bed

reflecting side up,
fall into me,

it will be your own
mouth you hit, firm and glassy,

you own eyes you find you
are up against closed closed

ii

There is more to a mirror
than you looking at

you full-length body
flawless but reversed,

there is more than this dead blue
oblong eye turned outwards to you.

Think about the frame.
The frame is carved, it is important,

it exists, it does not reflect you,
it does not recede and recede, it has limits

and reflections of its own.
There's a nail in the back

to hang it with; there are several nails,
think about nails.

pay attention to the nail
marks in the wood,

they are important too.

iii

Don't assume it is passive
or easy, this clarity

with which I give you yourself.
Consider what restraint it

takes: breath withheld, no anger
or joy disturbing the surface

of the ice.
You are suspended in me

beautiful and frozen, I
preserve you, in my you are safe.

It is not a trick either,
it is a craft:

mirrors are crafty.

iv

I wanted to stop this,
this life flattened against the wall,

mute and devoid of colour,
built of pure light,

this life of vision only, split
and remote, a lucid impasse.

I confess: this is not a mirror,
it is a door

I am trapped behind.
I wanted you to see me here,

say the releasing word, whatever
that may be, open the wall.

Instead you stand in front of me combing your hair.

v

You don't like these metaphors.
All right:

Perhaps I am not a mirror.
Perhaps I am a pool.

Think about pools.

Margaret Atwood, Selected Poems

For now we see through a glass,
darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part;
but then shall I know even as also I am known.

1 Corinthians 13:12

The mirror image has its well-known importance in magic and folklore and has been greatly developed in baroque and romantic literature, but also in the twentieth century, especially in Post World War II literature as a device evincing a separation from self. The use of the mirror image as separation from self may be found, for example, in Jean Gênet's Le Balcon in which male customers visit the mirrored rooms of a brothel and engage in various fantasies, yet even their temporary illusion is interrupted by reality as bombs shake the house, reminding all of the war outside.

Another example of the theme of the separation from self is found in Gerturde Stein's Ida, the first line of which reads,

> There was a baby born named Ida. It's mother held it with her hands to keep Ida from being born but when the time came Ida came. And as Ida came, with her came her twin, so there was Ida-Ida.[1]

An author such as Lewis Carroll and a film-maker such as Jean Cocteau, depict a quest for identity and separation from same through the motif of the mirror image. Anne Hébert and Margaret Atwood follow this tradition.

The use of the mirror image is an essential tool employed by Hébert in her art, depicting duality in every aspect of life; death and life, demonic and angelic, ugliness and beauty: all existing side by side in harmony and in conflict. Hébert uses the mirror image to provoke both reality and illusion; Maurice Emond discusses the symbolic significance of mirrors in Hébert's poetic universe:

> La poétique du regard chez Anne Hébert se résorbe en un miroir type qui a ceci de particulier qu'il est en fait double, ou plus exactement à double face, si bien que nous pourrions le qualifier de 'miroir à deux faces,' tant il peut être trompeur. Non pas deux miroirs différents mais un seul qui a son endroit et son envers, à la mesure du monde imaginaire d'Anne Hébert et de sa vision du monde. L'endroit, c'est le reflet séduisant des surfaces qui proposent des images de beauté, de lumière, de ciel bleu, de blanc, d'absolu. Mais il suffit de franchir la limite, de dépasser le tain, de se mirer avec un peu plus d'attention, pour découvrir l'envers du miroir et les images des profondeurs. Alors, la nuit et le noir succèdent le jour et à l'éclat du blanc, les morts aux vivants, la bête à l'ange, la laideur à la beauté. L'envers est à l'exacte mesure de l'endroit mais aux valeurs contraires. A moins que ce ne soit l'endroit qui s'oppose à la profondeur ténébreuse. Deux mondes superposés, deux abîmes dos à dos, se reproduisant à l'infini, aussi excessifs l'un que l'autre; reflets inversés, doubles antithétiques. Entre les deux, au milieu, la frontière invisible du miroir. Illusion du regard trompé à sa source même. Déchirure et écartèlement du regard que le thème du miroir vient illustrer avec un rare bonheur. Vertu magique du miroir qui n'est autre que le regard même de l'auteure, sa vision d'un monde déchiré par des forces contraires. 2

The mirror image is used by Hébert essentially as an extension of the Narcissus story, as portrayed by Ovidus' Metamorphoseon libri and Paul Valéry's Fragments du Narcisse.[3] Emond argues that Hébert's portrait of Elisabeth before the mirror is directly linked with the Narcissus myth; Elisabeth looks into the mirror and sees herself as she wants to be seen, not as she actually is:

> C'est devant le miroir qu'Elisabeth se retrouvre telle qu'elle veut être. Tout autour, dans la chambre, ce ne sont que reflets de désordre, de maladie et de mort. Le visage de Jérôme dans la glace est une figure traquée déjà surprise par la mort et qui guette à son tour le moindre signe de décrépitude

> chez elle. Elisabeth va à la rencontre de sa propre image comme Narcisse au-devant de sa beauté. Un narcissisme non pas masochiste mais bien idéalisant. 4

As the characters in Hébert's world confront their mirror image, they escape into an illusion of beauty and purity or into the reality of their baser, more sinister natures. According to the Dictionnaire de symboles by Chevalier and Gheerbrant the mirror is represented by:

> ... signe de l'harmonie, de l'union conjugale, le miroir brisé étant celui de la séparation. 5

Emond writes of this representation of the mirror image by asserting that the mirror does not provide this kind of marital harmony, rather represents phantoms of their other selves:

> Mais déjà au début le miroir n'était qu'un fragment de miroir, recouvert en plus de suie. L'image d'Antoine au front bandé est insupportable. Elisabeth ne choisit plus ses reflets. Le miroir semble générer ses propres fantômes; doué d'un pouvoir autonome, il impose désormais ses images. Malgré son désir, Elisabeth semble incapable de le détrure tout à fait. Subsiste un minuscule triangle, si clair, si limpide, si pur que son éclat peut lui percer le coeur. 6

The mirror image is exploited, therefore, as a vehicle for expressing the dualistic nature of the universe.

Elisabeth allows herself to regress into the past as the mirror provokes memories of another time and space:

> La vraie vie est ailleurs; rue du Parloir, au chevet de mon mari. Je m'assois pourtant, docile, sur le tabouret. Face à la glace piquée. (K., 133)

Hébert consistently uses the image of the mirror as a tool to divide Elisabeth into several people; the protagonist looks at her reflection in the mirror and does not like what she sees:

> La femme dans la glace, a les yeux battus. Un visage trop rond. Des cernes sous les yeux. Un cou trop large pour le col de lingerie froissée. (K., 246)

Elisabeth describes herself in the third person narrative, making her reflection sound like an objective description of a given form of matter. Finding the image disturbing, she retreats into the mirror again, attempting to recapture her youth:

> Mon image ternie dans la glace. Après une si longue nuit. Effacer cette buée d'un revers de manche. Retrouver ma jeunesse.... (K., 246)

The importance of the image of the mirror as a reflection of illusion is used consistently throughout Hébert's text.

Protagonist Elisabeth first divides herself through the vehicle of the mirror:

> Mme Rolland se redresse, refait les plis de sa jupe, ajuste ses bandeaux. Va vers la glace, à la rencontre de sa propre image, comme on va vers le secours le plus sûr. (K., 14)

Yet she is a prisoner. As Madame Tassy, faced by a raving husband, she closes her eyes, refusing to admit that she is existing in an unseemly present:

> Aie. Le morceau de glacé se casse en mille miettes. Un seul éclat persiste au mur.
> Miniscule triangle guilloché. Mais si clair. Limpide. Non, je ne bourgerai pas. Je resterai ainsi le temps qu'il faudra, mon fils serré contre mon sein. Je garderai les yeux obstinément fermés. Il faudrait me les ouvrir de force, pour que je consente à regarder. Cette glace est trop pure. (K., 85)

In folklore, the broken mirror is an omen of bad luck, hence this broken mirror foreshadows and symbolizes both the destruction of their marriage

and the death of Antoine.

The image of the mirror is again used as a device of retreat from self for Madame Tassy; she enjoys seeing her face clouded by spots on the mirror and is outraged when Aurélie tries to wipe off the spots:

> -Je vais nettoyer la glace.
> J'ai un mouvement du recul.
> -Non, surtout ne touche pas à la glace ...
> Le miroir ravivé comme une source. Ma jeunesse sans un pli. L'échafaudage des boucles me semble un peu ridicule. Un port de reine. Une âme de vipère. Un coeur fou d'amour. (K., 134)

One of the ways in which Aurélie is persuaded to assist in the murder of Antoine Tassy is by seeing the image of her reflection in the mirror. The mirror is depicted as a malevolent object, portraying images of illusion for the purpose of provoking evil. Aurélie is able to descend into a world of illusion and deception as she faces her own distorted image in the mirror:

> Nous lui tendons un miroir. Aurélie regarde sa propre image avec étonnement. Se laisse aller au ravissement le plus étrange. Puis, bat des mains. S'agite. Se trémousse. Se pavane dans toute la pièce. Revient au miroir. Déclare d'une voix haut perchée qui traîne.
> -Adorable. Je suis adorable, comme une vraie dame.... (K., 179)

The mirror persuades Aurélie to see herself in a deceptive manner; the image of the lady is an illusion. The mirror image exposes the dual nature of Aurélie and of Elisabeth, as well as the men in Elisabeth's life.

Antoine becomes amazed when he sees that he has a week's growth of beard on his face: he confronts the image of himself as if that of another person:

> Regarde avec étonnement dans la glace son visage envahi par une barbe mousseuse. (K., 145)

Elisabeth and Antoine confront the farce of their marriage only through the mirror, where they reveal their hatred for each other through their reflections:

> Un homme et une femme côté à côté. Marie et femme. Se haissent. Se provoquent mutuellement. Dans une lueur douce de bougies, allumées de chaque côté du miroir. (K., 134)

The image of Antoine Tassy facing his double in the mirror, seeing something there that he is not, and subsequently shooting his own image, is a common motif in world literature, designating retreat from self and an inability to cope with one's own life. Hébert reveals Antoine's Doppelgänger through the vehicle of the mirror image:

> Antoine se traîne à genoux sur le plancher. Il tente de se relever. Tient à répéter sa confession, face au petit mouceau de miroir, accroché au mur, au-dessus de la commode.
> -Je veux voir ma tête d'idiot dans la glace.
> Il écarquille les yeux. Ouvre la bouche. Exhibe une langue pâteuse. Tire une balle dans la glace. La rate. Un trou dans le mur. Tandis que l'éclat de verre intact (pendu à un clou) oscille. Vertigineusement. (K., 87)

There exist parallel scenes in world literature of a man attacking his image in the mirror, such as those in Britain's Poe, William Wilson and Russia's Dostoevsky, The Double.[7]

Tymms indicates other literary works with a similar use of the mirror image, for instance Franz Werfel's drama The Man in the Mirror (Spiegelmensch). Werfel's Thamal becomes obsessed by thoughts of inward division, being conscious of separate and conflicting selves.

Tymms points out that Werfel follows Hegel's formulation; thesis: affirmation, antithesis: negation, synthesis: comprehension, by opposing the other self. This is the second state in which a man becomes aware that he has projected into the outside world only his false self, the mirror-counterpart that is his true self's deadliest enemy; this is the first stage towards enlightenment, or true 'comprehension,' for this happens only when one has come to appreciate that the distinction between the false and the true is that existing between reflection and actuality. Once he has freed himself from his false and evil mirror-self by voluntary death of the better self, the man can awaken to a new life, in which he has no reflection; for in this Nirvana, in which conflict and effort have ceased, he is no longer divided into real and false selves: he no longer sees his selfish ego projected into everything around him and his vanity is cured. Harmony (the synthesis of comprehension) has brought his spiritual Doppelgängertum to an end. According to Tymms, on this foundation of mirror-symbolism by which man's ethical division is visually expounded, Werfel builds up his grandiose allegory of the 'self-conqueror,' who, in the scriptural sense, saves his life by losing it and, by freeing himself from his evil side, finds harmony by a 'miracle.' The process of self-liberation is not essentially different from that of E.T.A. Hoffman's Elixiere des Teufels, where the hero also strives to free himself from the domination of his baser self; but the manner in which the mirror-man is destroyed most obviously recalls the process of earlier fairy-plays. In Raimund's Alpekönig und Menschenfeind

the Doppelgänger, who incorporates the second self, confronts the hero in this guise, and forces him to acknowledge his true nature. As in Alpekönig und Menschenfeind, Thamal (when he first tries to free himself from the tyranny of the mirror-self by shooting it) is merely repeating Rappelkopf's attempt to banish the sight of the evil within him by breaking the tell-tale mirror. But Thamal's pistol-shot only frees the mirror-man from his imprisonment in the glass, to leave Thamal behind with the destiny of poverty and sorrow he would have to share with him. So the renegade reflection becomes great and powerful, first as Prince Regent, then the richest (and fattest) man in the world; just as Anderson's shadow deserts his master to become prosperous, and the consort of royalty. Yet, unlike the shadow, the mirror-man remains bound to Thamal in one essential aspect; both have only one life, like Rappelkopf and the transformed Astragalus: the mirror-man is vulnerable once Thamal brings himself to the point of voluntarily sacrificing himself; and, in fact, it is only by this means that the mirror-man is destroyed at all, after a panic terror recalling Hyde's unwilling dependence on Jekyll, into whom he hoped to return at the approach of his pursuers. [8]

Antoine Tassy's mirror-man, like that of Thamal, is bound to him; they have only one life. Like Rappelkopf, Antoine attempts to banish the sight of the evil within himself by shooting his reflection in the mirror. Also like Thamal, Antoine's shot at his own mirror-man produces no good effect and several bad ones; if anything, Antoine gets

worse as his mirror images, his evil-counterpart takes over and must ultimately be killed by external means, specifically George Nelson. In this example, the mirror is used by Hébert as a device of evil through a total separation of self.

The use of the folkloric motif of the mirror is an essential tool employed by Hébert and is evident in most of her novels. It is not just the characters in Kamouraska who confront their mirror-image as an external means of expressing their internal conflict, but also, for example, Francois in Le Torrent and Catherine in Les Chambres de bois. In Les Chambres de bois we see many instances where the motif of the mirror is used in connection with the classical myth of the Narciss legend: the relationship between Michel and his sister Lia; the jealousy of Catherine of this relationship and her cultivation of a friendship with Lia; and Catherine's repeated confrontation with her own mirror image. Like the men who engage in acts of fantasy in mirrored rooms in Gênet's Le Balcon, Catherine dances in a mirrored room, pretending that she is someone she is not. [9]

It has become evident, therefore, that Hébert's use of the mirror image is an integral part of her poetics and central to her theme.

Atwood's use of the mirror image in Lady Oracle is equally evident as that of Hébert, as a vehicle for the expression of multiplication of self. Frank Davey explains that the mirror in Atwood's writing is deceptive, invariably invoking the Narcissus legend; it is a false pond, something to be treated as water rather than glass, to be plunged

through into otherness rather than allowed to shine back self. If believed to be glass, Davey maintains, it reflects at worst a false, often reversed image, and further distorts a character's already weak sense of identity.[10] Davey's analysis of mirror images in Atwood's novel is quite perceptive and accurate.

Atwood first uses the mirror image as a means of reflecting the duplicitous nature of her protagonist Joan:

> I would dab myself with perfume, take off my shoes, and dance in front of the mirror, twirling slowly around, waltzing with an invisible partner. A tall man in evening dress, with an opera cloak and smoldering eyes. As he swept me in circles (bumping occasionally into the dressing table or the end of the bed) he would whisper, 'Let me take you away. We will dance together, always.' It was a great temptation, despite the fact that he wasn't real.... (L.O., 23)

Joan subsequently makes the decision to lose weight after having acknowledged her inability to confront herself in the mirror for years:

> I didn't usually look at my body, in a mirror or in any other way; I snuck glances at parts of it now and then, but the whole thing was too overwhelming. (L.O., 121)

After losing some weight, Joan confronts the mirror as a vehicle to express the reality of her evolving image; she is fascinated by the image of herself in process:

> At home I spent hours in front of the mirror, watching as my eyebrows, then my mouth, began to spread across my face. I was dwindling. The sight of a fat person on the street, which used to inspire fellow feeling, I now found revolting. (L.O., 121)

As a very young child Joan's sense of her own inadequacy is reinforced

by her mother; confronted by the mirror, she is told that she does not look the way her mother wishes her to look:

> Even I was a little taken aback when she finally allowed me to inspect myself in the three-sided mirror over her vanity table. Although I was too young to be much bothered by my size, it wasn't quite the effect I wanted. I did not look like a butterfly. But I knew the addition of the wings would make all the difference. I was hoping for magical transformations. (L.O., 46)

Joan is allowed to dance in the ballet class performance in her costume of a butterfly, rather she must wear a mothball suit, stomp around and be an object of mirth, an image that haunts her throughout her life. As a small child, she confronts her image in the mirror, her face distorted by tears and ruined make-up:

> Afterwards I pulled the laundry hamper over so I could stand on it and look into the bathroom mirror. My made-up face had run, there were black streaks down my cheeks like sooty tears and my purple mouth was smudged and swollen. What was the matter with me? It wasn't that I couldn't dance. (L.O., 50)

As for Elisabeth in Kamouraska, the mirror for Joan is often used as a means of self-escape. Elisabeth strives to confront her subconscious self only so far as her demonic side is not evident to her, Joan, however, retreats from all sides of her personality, good and bad, in an elaborate process of conscious and unconscious self-denial. Joan's philosophy of life can be summed up in her belief that there are only two kinds of people. She consciously recognizes the fact that Arthur sees only the reality of her shape, yet she does not see herself the way he sees her. Joan's conscious denial of self is depicted through the mirror:

> What he (Arthur) failed to understand was that there were really only two kinds of people: fat ones and thin ones. When I looked at myself in the mirror, I didn't see what Arthur saw. The outline of my former body still surrounded me, like a mist, like a phantom moon, like the image of Dumbo the flying Elephant superimposed on my own. I wanted to forget the past, but it refused to forget me; it waited for sleep, then cornered me. (L.O., 214)

Joan consciously rejects the distortions of the fun-house mirrors because there is no middle ground, the mirrors make you look either fat or thin, and according to Joan's philosophy of life, these are the only possibilities,

> It (the fun house) had phosphorescent skeletons, and distorting mirrors that stretched you and shrank you. I found those mirrors disturbing. I didn't want to be fatter than I already was, and being thinner was impossible. (L.O., 90)

Joan's dualistic vision of the universe is depicted by Atwood through glimpses into the protagonist's past, including her childhood. From this vantage point, Joan's mother becomes a central figure in taking the blame for her daughter's duplicitous personality; this segregation of self is expressed through the image of the mirror. Joan remembers her mother holding her up to the triple mirror, to perceive any number of images that she may become:

> I was a throw-back, the walking contradiction of her pretensions to status and elegance. But after all she was my mother, she must have treated me as a child, though I could remember only glimpses, being held up by her to look at myself in the triple mirror when she'd brushed my hair, or being hugged by her in public, in the company of other mothers. (L.O., 180)

The mirror subsequently becomes a medium for provoking reality, and then for going beyond reality into part of Joan's mythological psyche, as

she recalls the Medusa myth[11] (in the original Medusa myth, the mirror plays a significant role) and equates the monster with her mother:

> Although her vanity tables became more grandiose as my father got richer, my mother always had a triple mirror so she could see both sides as well as the front of her head. In the dream, as I watched, I suddenly realized that instead of three reflections she had three actual heads, which rose from her toweled shoulders on three separate necks ... this didn't frighten me, as it seemed merely a confirmation of something I'd always known ... my mother was a monster. (L.O., 67)

Joan's mother desperately attempts to retreat into the mirror as a means of finding the perfect image, yet she is confronted with reality:

> Instead of making her happier, these sessions appeared to make her sadder, as if she saw behind or within the mirror some fleeting image she was unable to capture or duplicate; and when she was finished she was always a little cross. (L.O., 66)

Joan's feelings of sympathy for her mother's sadness are completely overshadowed by the image of her mother as the Medusa, divided and evil:

> In the image of her that I carried for years, hanging from my neck like an iron locket, she was sitting in front of her vanity table, painting her fingernails a murderous red and sighing ... Her lips were thin but she made a larger mouth with lipstick over and around them, like Bette Davis, which gave her a curious double mouth, the real one showing through the false one like a shadow. (L.O., 68)

Atwood provides many instances in the novel where Joan's mother, though menacing and cold, like the Medusa monster, is also helpless and sad. Joan's subconscious is constantly being prowled by bewitching demons evoking the image of her dead mother, under water, crying. After having gone, supernaturally, into the mirror, Joan finds that she

has unconsciously written down the following haunting poem about a woman; an image of both her mother and herself:

> Who is the one standing in the prow
> Who is the one voyaging
> under the sky's arch, under the earth's arch
> under the arch of arrows
> in the death boat, why does she sing
> She kneels, she is bent down
> under the power
> her tears are jagged
> her tears are the death you fear
> Under the water, under the water sky
> her tears fall, they are dark flowers. (L.O., 222)

Joan frantically attempts to find out who this woman could be, negating the image of herself or of her mother:

> At first the sentences centered around the same figure, the same woman. After a while I could see her: she lived under the earth somewhere, or inside something, a cave or a hugh building; sometimes she was on a boat. She was enormously powerful. This woman puzzled me. She wasn't like anyone I'd ever imagined, and certainly she had nothing to do with me. I wasn't at all like that, I was happy. Happy and inept. (L.O., 222)

Joan begins to internalize, through the medium of the mirror and automatic handwriting, her own convoluted love relationships:

> Then another person, a man, began to turn up. Something was happening between the two of them; crypic love letters formed on the pages, obscure, frightening. This man was evil, I felt, but it was hard to tell. Sometimes he seemed good. He had many disguises. (L.O., 222)

Critic Frank Davey maintains that mirrors, in Atwood's universe, represent the need to see beyond or behind the actual mirror, to treat the mirror as a pool. In the case of Joan in Lady Oracle, she has been plagued all her life by images reflected back at her both by real mirrors

and by metaphorical mirrors of billboards, movies and magazine advertising. One of Joan's major tasks in the book, Davey says, is to look past the various mirror images that confront her, to separate herself from the reflected image; when Joan actually goes into the mirror through the device of the Automatic Handwriting, she is actually taking a journey past narcissism and the derivative image into the subconscious self.[12]

Joan does, indeed, attempt to find her subconscious self, yet retreats whenever she come too close, she admits that she needs to find someone, yet she is afraid of the truth:

> I stared at the candle in the mirror, the mirror candle. There was more than one candle, there were three, and I knew that if I moved the two sides of the mirror toward me there would be an infinite number of candles, extending in a line as far as I could see ... The room seemed very dark, darker than it had before; the candle was very bright, I was holding it in my hand and walking along a corridor, I was descending, I turned a corner. I was going to find someone. I needed to find someone. (L.O., 220)

The candle, reflected in the triple mirror, triplicates, and Joan continues to follow the corridor in search of herself:

> There was a sense of going along a narrow passage that led downward, the certainty that if I could only turn the next corner or the next, for these journeys became longer, I would find the thing, the truth or word or person that was mine, that was waiting for me. (L.O., 221)

As Joan comes closer to finding out the truth of her inner self, her fear at potential self-discovery transforms into an aura of evil, exemplified in her art, as she puts her own protagonist Penelope into the mirror situation:

> Penelope felt an aura of evil gather in the room; it grew thick around her. Despite herself, she felt her gaze being drawn to the flame; her mind fluttered, fascinated, helpless as a moth, her own reflection disappeared ... further into the mirror she went, and further, till she seemed to be walking on the other side of the glass, in a land of indistinct shadows. (L.O., 218)

Joan's all-consuming fear of finding out who she really is, hence necessitating a destruction of all her separate lives, is so great, that she convinces herself that doom awaits her if she continues to journey into the mirror. The mirror subsequently becomes a malevolent object provoking evil, consciously admitted by Joan in her own art:

> It was Felicia who had written BEWARE in blood across her yellowing, warped bedroom mirror ... (L.O., 193)

Joan negates this much later when the message to beware becomes a frightening reality in her own life as she goes into the mirror and is unable to get out:

> I went into the mirror one evening and I couldn't get out again. (L.O., 223)

Joan decides to stop what she terms "this stupidity," and to retreat even further into her own separate lives, as a means of securing safety and comfort.

This brief anlaysis of mirror images in both Kamouraska and Lady Oracle reveals both authors' awareness and use of this image from a long literary tradition.

IV. 5. DREAM IMAGES

Dreams are the true interpreters of our inclinations, but art is required to sort and understand them.

Montaigne, Essays, Book iii, chapter 13

Hébert uses the third person narrative as a means of distancing Madame Rolland from the events which she narrates. Elisabeth's state of mind is situated, during this time of dreaming, in a twilight zone between the conscious and the unconscious. As Madame Rolland, Elisabeth rebukes herself for choosing to retreat into her past through dream hallucinations:

> Votre mari se meurt dans une des chambres du premier, et vous feignez de dormer, étendue sur le lit de l'institutrice de vos enfants. Vous entendez des voix, madame Rolland. Vous jouez à entendre des voix. Vous avez des hallucinations. Avez-vous donc tant besoin de sistractions qu'il vous faut aller chercher, au plus creux des ténèbres, les fantômes de votre jeunesse? (K., 76)

The third person narrative is always used when Madame Rolland loses control of her memories; Elisabeth, during her dream state, has the uncensored reality forced upon her:

> Elisabeth d'Aulnières, veuve d'Antoine Tassy, entre en scène, à cet instant précis. Pénétrée à la limite extrême du chauchemar. Sans aucun refuge à l'intérieur de soi. Chassée hors de soi. Jetée dehors. (Quittant tout à fait Mme Rolland, sa dignité et sa hauteur). N'ayant jamais été aussi profondément sépérée de soi-même. (K., 231)

Madame Rolland's separation from self is forced upon her through dreams of her past forced upon her unconscious mind. When she is able to control the dreams, the narrative voice shifts to the first person:

> Je frappe dans mes mains. (Je ne sais quelle réserve de force, quel sursaut d'énergie). Chasser les fantômes. Dissiper l'effroi. Organiser le songe. Conserver un certain équilibre. Le passé raisonnable revécu à fleur de peau. Respecter l'ordre chronologique. Ne pas tenter de parcourir toute sa vie d'un coup. (K., 97)

Madame Rolland recalls the past during the fever of her dreams and chooses to recall events in the first person narrative, as the memories are not bad ones:

> L'éspace d'une seconde. Il suffit d'une seconde. Et ma vie chassée ma rejoint au galop. Rattrape le temps perdu, d'un seul coup. (K., 112)

After years of constant recollections of some truths of her character and the subsequent frenzied retreat from the pain of the recognition, Elisabeth has reached the point where, to forget, she invokes a dream-like state. The past keeps haunting her and she must face the forced intrusion of her various lives into her psyche:

> Je pourrais encore m'échapper. Ne pas provoquer la suite. Reprendre pied rue du Parloir. Ouvrir les yeux, enfin. Hurler, les mains en porte-voix: je suis Mme Rolland. Trop tard. Il est trop tard. Le temps retrouvé s'ouvre les veines. (K., 115)

Elisabeth's constant assertion, "trop tard, trop tard," indicates that she can no more negate her different unpleasant selves than she can stop breathing. Hébert portrays Elisabeth's escape from self through her character's haunted dreams of her horrendous past. Elisabeth's inability to come to terms with her memories is a recurring motif throughout the text. Let us examine the progression of Elisabeth's attacks of a guilty conscience through various dream images of Madame Rolland.

While under the influence of sedatives, Hébert's protagonist relates the following:

> Mme Rolland se débat sur le lit de léontime Mélacon. Elle tente de sortir de ce cauchemar ... Parvient à fermer les yeux. Dans le noir cherche éperdument l'issue cahcée pour sortir de ce cirque. (K., 49)

Elisabeth alternates in her dream states and, most of the time, is clearly haunted by her past:

> L'homme qui fait un tel cauchemar se lève. Le poids de toute sa vie sur les épaules. L'étau du songe sur l'estomac. Le grincement rouillé de la pompe ... je tourmente cet homme et je le hante. Comme it me tourmente et me hante. (K., 156)

Elisabeth again reinforces the notion of the past haunting them both, when they were other people, separate from their present selves, yet unable to bring the two lives together:

> Je suis Mme Rolland. Je te hante, comme tu me hantes. Nous délirons tous les deux. La séparation entre nous a déjà en lieu.
> Mourir d'épuisement. Après une si grande passion, une si forte passion vécue et sufferte. Le mirage du bonheur se levant devant nous sur la route gelée. (K., 223)

While in her drug-induced dream-state, Elisabeth recounts events from her past, again indulging in self-justification in order to avoid her evil counterpart; she portrays her mother-in-law as evil for not having understood the predicament of her marriage to Antoine:

> La belle-mére, vexée, frappe avec sa canne sur le plancher. Trois coups bien distincts. Nous abandonne à notre destin d'histrions. Se retire. Méprisante.
> -Tout ca, c'est du théâtre. (K., 85)

Elisabeth continues to be haunted by the voice of her mother-in-law, accusing her of the duplicitous person that she is since her image is very important to her; it disturbs her that her mother-in-law sees the essential truth of Elisabeth's disguise:

> 'Tout ca c'est du théâtre,' déclare la voix méprisante de ma belle-mère. Comme si je n'attendais

> plus que ce signal, j'entre en scène. Je dis 'je' et je suis une autre. (K., 115)

In character, Aurélie Caron is a foil to the more venerable Madame Elisabeth; the former is forced, by the latter, to divide herself and to retreat from the reality of self. Aurélie is, in reality, a simple, superstitious peasant girl with no ambition to project an image of what she would like others to see in her. Elisabeth and George Nelson lull Aurélie into a dream-like state in an effort to induce the peasant girl to look at herself as someone else:

> Tu vivras comme une dame, en velours rouge ... tu reste durant ta vie entière dans une chambre, assise sur un sofa, habillée en velours rouge ou bleu ... (K., 180)

The opposite image of the real Aurélie is made explicit by Elisabeth, who describes the girl as she actually is:

> Sa jupe mince lui colle aux jampes. Ses pieds nus sont pleins de glaise séchée. Deux ongues nattes de cheveux crépus lui battent le dos, deux espèces de lanièrer noires, auréolées d'épines roussies dans le soleil. (K., 61)

Elisabeth's strange and unnatural upbringing by three spinster aunts and a shapeless shadowy widowed mother, leave her straining to break away from all the confinement of four pious old maids. The stifling environment in which Elisabeth was raised is exemplified continuously throughout the text; Elisabeth's escape from self is evinced through images of hypocritical religion and duplicitous respectability of the aunts.

Elisabeth begins to define her spinister aunts in retrospect, portraying her own frustration with having been stifled and her later

escape from self, as she remembers her aunts in nebulous dreams:

> C'est très étrange. Les objects de Léontine eux-mêmes changent doucement. Je suis sûre que ce ne sont plus tout à fait les mêmes. Imperceptiblement, ils deviennent autres. L'appareil des saintes vielles filles riches se déploie maintenant sur la commode de Léontine. Vierges d'argent, missels dorés sur tranche, broche d'émeraude, chapelets de perles. Les trésors de mes tantes, les trois petites Lanouette, s'étalent sur le marbre noir, veiné de blanc. (K., 42)

Dreams of her aunts lead Elisabeth to remember the trial, her day in court, and the betrayal of one aunt who has an attack of conscience for lying about Elisabeth's innocence:

> 'La petite se damne. Et nous nous damnons avec elle ... ' La foule, un instant saisie par cet aveu, éclate de rire. Mme Rolland se débat sur le lit de Léontine Mélancon. Elle tente de sortir de ce cauchemar. (K., 49)

Save the family name, at all costs, including murder, perjury and potential damnation; it is little wonder that Elisabeth is unable to live up to such high expectations.

From this analysis we may conclude that Elisabeth is as much a victim of her time and space as she is of herself; her knowledge of folkloric legends and beliefs manifests itself during her dream states of mind. Through the device of dreams Hébert is able to depict a great deal about the hypocrisy and corruption of the time, especially through the shifts in first person to third person narration during Elisabeth's hallucinations as well as her more lucid moments.

Atwood's protagonist Joan has some dreams, but more usually they assume the form of a very conscious kind of daydreaming in which her various lives are split and changed.

Aunt Lou appears to have several lives as well, her images include that of the respectable old maid who works in the feminine protection department juxtaposed with the young wife of a rakish gambler, swept away by passion. Though projecting an image of uprightness to certain people, her second life includes weekly soirées with another woman's husband and attendance at a questionable religious establishment of Spiritualists in an attempt to contact the dead. Joan has daydreams of Aunt Lou being her real mother:

> In one of my daydreams I used to pretend Aunt Lou was my real mother, who for some dark but forgivable reason had handed me over to my parents to be brought up. Maybe I was the child of the handsome gambler, who would one day reappear, or Aunt Lou had had me out of wedlock when she was very young. In this case my father was not my real father, and my mother ... but here it broke down, for what could have persuaded my mother to take me in if she hadn't been obliged to? (L.O., 88)

From her experience with the Spiritualists at the Jordan Chapel, Joan, during her dream state, thinks that Aunt Lou died the moment she was shot,

> I developed a raging fever, with delirium. One of the results of this was the notion that I'd been hit with an arrow at precisely the moment Aunt Lou died and that the shot had been guided by her departing spirit. (L.O., 120)

In her later adult life Joan's dreams become haunted by horrendous visions of her mother's inability to love her, to save and rescue her,

> One of the bad dreams I used to have about my mother was this. I would be walking across the bridge and she would be standing in the sunlight on the other side of it, talking to someone else, a man whose face I couldn't see. When I was halfway across, the bridge would start to collapse, as I'd always feared it would. It's rotten planks buckled

> and split, it tilted over sideways and began to topple slowly into the ravine. I would try to run but it would be too late, I would throw myself down and grab onto the far edge as it rose up, trying to slide me off. I called out to my mother, who could still have saved me, she could have pulled me back with her to firm ground. But she didn't do this, she went on with her conversation, she didn't even notice that anything unusual was happening. She didn't even hear me. (L.O., 65)

Joan's subconscious mind lated evokes an image of physical separation between herself and her mother; in this case, Joan dreams of hearing her mother's voice from the other side:

> In the worse dream I couldn't see her at all. I would be hiding behind a door, or standing in front of one, it wasn't clear which. It was a white door, like a bathroom door or perhaps a cupboard. I'd been locked in, or out, but on the other side of the door I could hear voices. Sometimes there were a lot of voices, sometimes only two; they were talking about me, discussing me, and as I listened I would realize that something very bad was going to happen. I felt helpless, there was nothing I could do. In the dream I would back into the farthest corner of the cubicle and wedge myself in, press my arms against the walls, dig my heels against the floor. They wouldn't be able to get me out. Then I would hear the footsteps, coming up the stairs and along the hall. (L.O., 214)

Joan's dreams reveal her fear of the other side and of becoming like her mother; Joan will always be haunted by her mother as an essential part of herself from which she always wants to escape.

V. LOOKING THROUGH THE WINDOW MOTIF

E. D. Blodgett, in his book Configuration: Essays on the Canadian Literatures, explains that one of the most poignant kinds of self-reflection of the character by a house is an extension of the character at the window motif. The window that Elisabeth looks out of not only extends character, but ironically suggests the house as prison and enclosure. Although transparent, it is still a wall, a recurrent sign between the exchange of the interior and the exterior. The window will separate Elisabeth and her lover forever.[1]

The image of her lover through the window represents the external reality of their separation juxtaposed with the internal illusion of their relationship and of their perceptions of each other,

> Je dois lui dire adieu à travers une vitre. Désormais, entre nous, il y aura cet écran de verre et de gel. Ton image déformée par le givre et la mort passera de l'autre côté du monde. (K., 189)

Looking through the glass at the outer scene, the physical separation of the glass allows Elisabeth to view her lover in an illusory way; indeed, Elisabeth says,

> Le passé franchi, d'un bond prodigieux. Le meurtre et la folie réduits à leurs dimensions raisonnables. Exorcisés. Retrouvant leur poids réel. Non plus vus à travrs une loupe à multiples facettes. (La déformation de l'angoisse et de la terreur). (K., 211)

It becomes increasingly clear that the whole love affair between Elisabeth and Doctor Nelson is doomed: a fact exemplified by the recurring image of Elisabeth entrapped in her home, with the window separating her and George:

> Je suis prisonnière sous le pluie. Je songe à cet autre prisonnier de la pluie que je ne puis rejoindre, dans sa maison tout là-bas. Le bruit des gouttes d'eau sur le toit de bardeaux. Si je retrouve son visage c'est à travers une vitre. (K., 152)

The image of Elisabeth straining to hear her lover's footfall through the window is exemplified as she waits for him in the middle of the night:

> Je guette en vain le pas d'un cheval, le passage d'un traineau. Se peut-il qu'il ne revienne plus rôder sous mes fenêtres? Un instant, il m'attire vers lui, il m'appelle Elisabeth. Puis il me rejette aussitôt à ma fenêtre ... Comme il m'a regardée. Son oeil percant. Son air traqué. (K., 127)

The motif of the woman at the window is evident as Elisabeth pretends to encourage Aurélie on her mission of murder, as that of a kindly benefactress bestowing blessings on her charge; in reality, Elisabeth is manipulating an obtuse peasant girl into murdering her husband, so as to be free to be with her lover:

> Je voudrais encourager cette fille chargée d'une si redoutable mission. Lui sourire derrière ma vitre. Lui promettre toutes les merveilles qui peuvent transformer sa vie. (K., 185)

The window is depicted, in one sense, as entrapment for Elisabeth, yet Elisabeth sees the window and the light from the window as a source of power for Antoine.

Antoine's psychotic madness is expressed in images of him and the window as he confronts the light from the window and his reflection with much irresponsible negation:

> Cet homme est fou. Le voici immobile et tranquille assis dans son fauteuil. Ou debout. Figé comme une souche lourde. Contre-jour dans la fenêtre. (K., 86)

The light from the window enhances Antoine's madness through his insane negation of the pain that the light causes to his eyes:

> Il y a trop de soleil dans cette maison aussi. Antoine ne tente aucun geste pour se retirer de la fenêtre où il se tient debout, exposé en plein lunière. Ses yeux rougis ne clignent pas. On dirait qu'il se soumet lui-même, sans aucune espèce de défense, au supplice de la lumière.
> Un long rayon traverse la pièce, m'atteint de plein fouet. Je suis prise au piège de la lumière à mon tour. Je détourne la tête. (K., 147)

Elisabeth invokes the window motif, in retrospect, as a source of ultimate freedom; this was the case during her childhood, Elisabeth becomes a child of innocence and of daring:

> Me libérer. Retrouver l'enfance libre et forte en moi. La petite fille aux cheveux tondus s'échappant de la maison par une fenêtre. Pour rejoindre les gamins de Sorel. (K., 123)

Maurice Emond discusses Elisabeth's perception of the window as freedom during childhodd:

> Déjà, enfant, Elisabeth d'échappait par une fenêtre avec sa tête de petit garcon tondu pour aller rejoindre les gamins de Sorel pêcher avec eux du côté des iles. La fenêtre proposait déjà l'évasion de l'univers maternel et la découverte des grands espaces libres. Mais bien vite ramenée à la maison, la récalcitrante, derrière la fenêtre, devra se contenter la plupart du temps d'une évasion par le regard qui suit les arrivées et les départs, toute la vie du dehors. 2

For the child the window meant freedom, an escape into the outside: as a mature woman facing mortality, the outside world is fearful and the window is the portal to despair:

> Elisabeth referma la jalousie et la fenêtre. Encore, un peu elle tirerait les rideaux. Pour se protéger, se barricader contre toute attaque de l'extérieur. (K., 25)

Emond explains that the window motif is used to depict Elisabeth's multi facetted vision of herself and her self-imposed imprisonment:

> Elisabeth est tout regard; elle se perd en regard. Elle transgresse sa fonction de vigie pour devenir voyante. Elle n'est plus vision mais voyance. Elle se projette dans l'espace, traverse tous les obstacles, s'infiltre partout, voit tout. Sa voyance est regard cosmique, regard transcendant. Elisabeth devient à la fois tous les témoins et le témoin principal. Ses rêves et rêveries défient le temps et l'espace, rassemblent tous les éléments de sa vie et, à la manière d'une 'loupe à multiples facettes' (K., 211), lui proposent une vision nouvelle. Le rêve aurait pu devenir le lieu d'une transformation, passage à un nouveau mode d'être, pourvu qu'il ne restât pas prisonnier de lui-même. Mais Elisabeth est finalement la première victime de son propre regard souverain qui se loge en elle pour mieux l'anéantir. Au réveil, la fenêtre magique et illusoire du rêve éclate en mille morceaux. Elisabeth se retrouve derrière les fenêtres closes de la chambre de Jérôme Rolland, brisée elle aussi à jamais. 3

Hébert's use of looking through the window motif is similar to that of Atwood's; both novels depict a dichotomy between looking outside to freedom or danger and looking inside to safety or entrapment. This dichotomy depicts a dualistic perception of the universe and strengthens the presentation of the retreat from self in both Kamouraska and Lady Oracle.

The woman looking through the window motif reveals the basic dogma of Atwood's thematic plan: the duality of life. This duality is depicted by the motif of the window and is manifested in both Joan's life and in the Gothic intertext. The window motif represents a world of constant shifts and changes; looking from the inside to the outside symbolizes both escape and entrapment. Looking from the outside to

the inside is an equally precarious endeavour. The unrealiability of the morality of the window is manifest in a poem by Hugh Clough, quoted in the text,

> And not by eastern windows only,
> When daylight comes, comes in the light;
> In front, the sun climbs slow, how slowly,
> But westward, look, the land is bright. (L.O., 107)

The sun rises in the East but it sets in the west. As one watches the rising of the sun through the eastern window, the source of light shifts to the western window: behind the watcher's back. The image evoked by this poem suggests the theme of the text, thereby legitimizing, somewhat, Joan's escape from self.

As Joan tells her story from the Other Side, the limbo-land between life and death, recurring images of escaping from the evil inside through the window to the freedom of the outside, are evident in the land of her self-imposed purgatory. Atwood portrays this image, at two different points in the book, in almost the same words. The first instance occurs near the beginning of Joan's story:

> I wanted to scream, to rush into the bathroom and shut and bolt the door, I could squeeze through the small window and run up the hill to my car, where did I put the keys? Faces formed and disintegrated in my head ... What did they want? I realized how visible I must be, back-lit behind the picture window. (L.O., 188)

The window is presented as a malevolent object denying exit into safety. The second occurrence of the same image occurs mid-way through the text,

> I felt like screaming, rushing into the bathroom, there was a high square window I might be able to squeeze through; then I could run up the hill and drive away in my car. Another fast getaway. I tried to remember where I'd put the keys. (L.O., 15)

Joan desperately wants to escape from the physical entrapment of enclosure, symbolizing her desire to escape from the singularity of her solitary existence in Terremoto, into another time and place in which she is able to love another life. Joan attempts to accomplish her quest for freedom by imposing the window motif into her art; the window motif in the Gothic intertext is a reversal of meaning from that of the central text. In Joan's Costume Gothic, the inside represents safety and happiness, separated by the window from the outside which represents danger and entrapment. The Gothic heroine Charlotte is coaxed from the safety of the enclosure of her bedroom, through the window, to the evil outside;

> From the outside the French windows came a trail of silvery laughter, a woman's voice ... at this hour, and in November, who could be walking on the terrace? Charlotte shivered, remembering those other footsteps she had heard in the same place the night before; but when she had looked down onto the terrace from her bedroom window, she could see nothing but moonlight and the shadows of the shrubberies moving in the wind. (L.O., 31)

The danger of the outside, as seen through the window, is the same during daylight, in which the inside is associated with brightness, peace and happiness juxtaposed with the intrigue of an outdoor conversation of conspiracy.

The hero Redmond looks from the outside into Charlotte's window evoking feelings of hope and happiness that await him inside:

> He and Charlotte had secret plans to marry, though because of the possibility of gossip they would not make these public for some time. He gazed fondly up at her lighted window. (T.O., 322)

The danger of the outside, as seen through the window, is manifest when Redmond's supposedly deceased wife suddenly appears, destroying all of his plans, his hope, his happiness: the latter three are safely inside with Charlotte.

We have seen that the window motif has been effectively employed by both Hébert and Atwood as a poetic device exemplifying their theme; as prison and enclosure and as freedom and light; the use of the window motif is essentially the same in both novels.

VI. BALCONIES IN LADY ORACLE

Robert Lecker, in his essay, "Janus through the Looking Glass: Atwood's First Three Novels," describes the structure of Lady Oracle as that of a failed romance. The heroine goes through all the motions that should lead to her inevitable release, only to discover that the romance's promised return from the dream world never occurs. Like her heroines, Joan casts herself as the maiden in flight who must repeatedly disguise herself in order to survive her own flights of fancy. Her escape brings her to Italy, and to new romantic roles: she plays the part of Juliet on her balcony, waiting for a Romeo who never appears, and the loneliness turns her into a Mariana figure who knows that he 'cometh not.' The relentless disruption of the romantic modes and conventions creates, on the one hand, an amusing parody of the genre. But on a more serious level, the disruption of traditional romance structures provides an implicit comment on the contemporary impossibility of ever finding the final sense of identity and completion or the ultimate vision of happiness which, as Joan well realizes, is usually offered by romance.[1]

Joan's profession of creating illusion is evident in her own life despite her smugness at having penetrated the problems that most women have. Joan always wants to believe that she will be rescued. This rescuing of the maiden in distress by the dashing hero is manifest primarily through the use of the motif of the balcony. Like the motif of the window, the balcony represents both escape and entrapment. This escape and entrapment are both real in that they are related to life, and are symbolic in their relation to the heroine's fantasy world:

> I'd always been fond of balconies. I felt that if I could only manage to stand on one long enough, the right one, wearing a long white trailing gown, preferably during the first quarter of the moon, something would happen: music would sound, a shape would appear below, sinuous and dark, and climb towards me, while I leaned fearfully, hopefully gracefully, against the wrought-iron railing and quivered. But this wasn't a very romantic balcony. It had a geometric railing like those on middle-income apartment buildings of the fifties, and the floor was poured concrete, already beginning to erode. It wasn't the kind of balcony a man would stand under playing a lute and yearning or clamber up bearing a rose in his teeth or a stiletto in his sleeve. Besides, it was only five feet off the ground. Any mysterious visitor I might have would be more likely to approach by the rough path leading down to the house from the street above, feet crunching on the cinders, roses or knives in his head only. (L.O., 8)

Despite Joan's realizations that her balcony in Terremoto is not the proper romantic balcony, she keeps hoping for a miracle rescue:

> I climbed back up to the balcony, feeling relieved. Once I'd dyed my hair, all the obvious evidence would be taken care of and I could start being another person, a different person entirely. (L.O., 20)

Joan sits on a chair on her balcony patiently awaiting the arrival of a mysterious stranger who will sweep her off her feet, into a whole new life:

> I made another cup of tea and went out to the balcony. I sat in the plastic chair, head back, eyes closed behind my dark glasses, and tried to empty my mind. (L.O., 320)

The only stranger who attends her balcony is the unsuitable and unwanted Mr. Vitroni:

> When Mr. Vitroni was safely off the balcony, I took the picture inside and looked for a place to hang it up. (L.O., 18)

Joan subsequently retreats from Mr. Vitroni a second time, hence completely negating him as a potential rescuer:

> I could hear footsteps coming down the gravel path, at a great distance, as though through layers of cotton wool. I was still half asleep; I struggled out of the chair and all the towels fell off. I snatched one up, retreating toward the door, but it was too late, Mr. Vitroni was coming around the corner, along the balcony. (L.O., 323)

Mr. Vitroni is the wrong person, he does not fil the role of the hero. Joan only wants to be rescued when the plot is invented and conducted by herself.

The balcony becomes a source of entrapment, as Joan, tired of waiting, begins to realize that her rescuer might not be coming:

> Where was the new life I'd intended to step into, easily as crossing a river? It hadn't materialized, and the old life went on without me, I was caged on my balcony waiting to change. (L.O., 310)

Joan is consciously frustrated by her own inertia, her passivity and inaction, yet she still waits to be rescued:

> I was safe, I could begin again, but instead I sat on my balcony, beside the remains of a kitchen window broken before my time, in a chair made of aluminum tubes and yellow plastic strips, and made choking noises. (L.O., 10)

Joan begins to negate her present time and space and retreats into the images of past memories; she associates the balcony with past events from her life:

> The wraith of Arthur would pursue me; already I could hear faint gargling noises from the bathroom, the crunch of glass as he scraped back his chair on the balcony, waiting for me to pass his cup of coffee out to him through the kitchen window. (L.O., 11)

Finally the balcony evolves into an object of evil intention, the light diminishes, sharp broken glass threatens to cut the feet (and eventually does):

> I finally reached the balcony. The sun was sinking, the balcony was bright with sunlit glass, broken and sharp like fire. In the plate-glass window my reflection ran beside me, the face dark, the hair standing out around my head, a red nimbus. (L.O., 340)

The balcony as evil intention becomes a balcony of direct malevolence reflecting the state of Joan's mind as she imposes the balcony motif onto her art; the Gothic intertext reads:

> As she ran along the terrace, a heavy stone jar, one of the ornaments of the balcony above, toppled over and crashed on the balustrade beside her, breaking into pieces, missing her by inches.... (L.O., 194)

Someone was trying to kill the Gothic heroine Charlotte, and Joan's own frustrations of not being rescued from her balcony are reflected in her novel.

A second way in which Atwood projects dualism of Romance is found in Joan's perception of love. Joan wants to believe in true love, the kind that she writes about in the Costume Gothics, yet, at heart, she is a realist: she knows that the kind of love women strive for is an illusion. This is the reason that she divides her life into various selves, as a means of having it all:

> Love was merely a tool, smiles were another tool, they were both just tools for accomplishing certain ends. No magic, merely chemicals. I felt I'd never really loved anyone, not Paul, not Chuck the Royal Porcupine, not even Arthur. I'd polished them with my love and expected them to shine, brightly enough to return my own reflection, enchanced and sparkling. (L.O., 282)

A paradox exists in the disparity between that which Joan's readers seek in their fantasy lives and the result of the retreat from self. Linda Hutcheon, in her essay, "From Poetic to Narrative Structures: The Novels of Margaret Atwood," tells us that the substitute worlds are seen as escapes, as wish-fulfilling improvements, that actually inhibit coming to terms with reality and with other people. [2]

Hutcheon's point is proven by Joan herself, who admits that her Gothic readers want it both ways, thereby negating, or cancelling out, any kind of fulfillment that they had strived for:

> They wanted their men to be strong, lustful, passionate, and exciting, with hard rapacious mouths, but also tender and worshipful. They wanted men in mysterious cloaks who would rescue them from balconies, but they also wanted meaningful in-depth relationships and total openness. (The Scarlet Pimpernel, I would tell them silently, does not have time for meaningful in-depth relationships). They wanted multiple orgasms, they wanted the earth to move but they also wanted help with the dishes. (L.O., 216)

Joan denies that she could fall into the trap of her readers, because for Joan, reality and fantasy are the same thing. Joan even admits that Arthur, taken as one person, in not enough for her:

> There were two kinds of love, I told myself; Arthur was terrific for one kind, but why demand all things of one man? ... I kept Arthur in our apartment and

> the strangers in their castles and mansions, where they belonged ... But I had the edge on them: after all, when it came to fantasy lives I was a professional, whereas they were merely amateurs. (L.O., 216)

Love and romance are not to be trusted, hence Joan neatly separates and catagorizes the characters of Romance as an elaborate method of self-preservation; to trust in one man to meet all of her expectations is foolish, instead she trusts in different characteristics in several different men.

Atwood's vision of Romance is a cutting, even nihilistic statement of the nature of relationships; the problem does not rest in the men themselves, but in the woman's completely unrealistic expectations, both of herself and of these men.

VII. CONCLUSION

In the criticism of the seventies, the term **postmodernism** began to appear to refer to contemporary self-conscious texts. [1]

Linda Hutcheon discusses the contemporary phenomenon of the auto referential or self-informaing text; this text includes within itself a commentary on its own narrative and/or linguistic identity, the essence of which is defined by the Narcissus myth. In her study, Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox, Hutcheon situates the phenomenon of contemporary self-conscious texts in relation to their literary history. The self-reflective metafiction of today, Hutcheon explains, is a continuation of an already existing narcissistic trend in the novel as it began parodically in Don Quixote and was handed on, through eighteenth-century critical self-awareness to nineteenth-century self-mirroring. Within Romanticism lie the seeds of the challenge to the almost contemporaneous concept of novelistic realism. Early in this century Virginia Woolf, Proust, Unamuno, and others began reminding their readers that, as Aristotle too had suggested, mimesis includes diegesis. Although the roots of metafiction are obviously in such a realization, the primary distinction between the self-consciousness of the novels of Gide or of Huxley, and the modern auto-awareness of the novels of Fowles or of Richardou, lies in the newly expanded scope of the vital mimetic contact between art and life. In the earlier texts, the main interest is in the writing process and its product. The focus today broadens to include a parallel process of equal importance to the concretization of the text - that of reading. In overtly or covertly baring its fictional

and linguistic systems, narcissistic narrative transforms the authorial process of shaping, of making, into part of the pleasure and challenge of reading as a co-operative, interpretative experience. [2]

This co-operative, interpretative experience to which Huthcheon refers, is epitomized by critic Roland Barthes in his study on modern narrative S/Z. Barthes advocates what he terms the **writerly** as applied to modern auto-referential texts, in opposition to the **readerly** classical texts: Barthes writes,

> The writerly text is a perpetual present, upon which no consequent language (which would invevitably make it past) can be superimposed; the writerly text is ourselves writing, before the infinite play of the world (the world as function) is traversed, intersected, stopped, plasticized by some singular system (Ideology, Genus, Criticism) which reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages. The writerly is the novelistic without the novel, poetry without the poem, the essay without the dissertation, writing without style, production without product, structuration without structure. But the readerly texts? They are products (and not productions), they make up the enormous mass of our literature. 3

Barthes' evaluation of the value of the writerly text is justified by his belief that the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text. [4]

The narcissistic narrative technique of Atwood's Lady Oracle exemplifies Huthceon's discussion of the nature of contemporary self-conscious texts as well as Barthes' discussion of modern writerly texts. Protagonist Joan comments throughout the novel on her own writing experience, most evident in her comments on the Gothic genre:

> 'Do not be frightened,' Estelle's voice said from a great distance. 'Tell us what you see. Tell us what you hear.'
>
> I'd been typing with my eyes closed, as usual, but at this point I opened them. I'd come up against a blank wall: I hadn't the least idea what Penelope would see or hear next. This was a long-standing habit of mine: when I came to a dead end, I tried to simulate the scene as much as possible and block out the action, like a stage director. (L.O., 218-19)

The same phenomenon of the contemporary self-conscious narrative appears in Hébert's Kamouraska, especially when Elisabeth tells the readers that she controls the narrative of the confession:

> Quoi qu'on dise et quoi qu'on fasse, je demeure le témoin principal de cette histoire de neige et de fureur. (K., 184)

The use of the self-conscious narrative is evident in other works by Hébert and Atwood.

Let us compare the treatment of a fairytale from folklore in Hébert's Les Chambres de bois and Atwood's short story The Man from Mars. In Hébert's novel, Michel places his sister Lia on such an unrealistic pedestal that ~~he compares her~~ with the heroine in The Princess and the Pea:

> -Souviens-toi du conte de La Princess et du pois, dit Michel qui s'était approché. Son visage rayonnait. Il s'inclina vers Lia, lui offrit le bras et, lentement, comme pour un tour de danse, conduisit sa soeur près du piano. 5

In contrast to Hébert's elevated image of of the consumptive princess bestowed upon her character Lia, is Atwood's blunt self-confessing narrative of her hefty heroine Christine in The Man from Mars:

> There was nothing devious about her and nothing interesting. Christine had always agreed with these estimates of herself. In childhood she had identified with the false bride or the ugly sister; whenever a story had begun, 'Once there was a maiden as beautiful as she was good,' she had known it wasn't her. 6

This obvious parody on the Gothic genre typifies much of Atwood's writing and exemplifies the dissolution of that genre in modern fiction.

Both Hébert and Atwood draw on a strong literary tradition of the divided self evident in, for example, the Gothic thriller by Mary Shelley, Frankenstein. The modern critical work The Madwoman in the Attic explains that Shelley's conscious or unconscious awareness of the monster woman implicit in the angel woman is perhaps clearest in the revisionary scene where her monster, as if taking his cue from Eve in Paradise Lost Book 4, first catches sight of his own image: [7]

> I had admired the perfect forms of my cottages - their grace, beauty and delicate complexions; but how was I terrified when I viewed myself in a transparent pool! At first I started back, unable to believe that it was indeed I who was reflected in the mirror; and when I became fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am, I was filled with the bitterest sensations of despondence and mortification. 8

This external image of the beastly monster representing the internal demonic side is rendered meaningful by Hébert and Atwood considering the social and religious backgrounds of their protagonists: Elisabeth representing that of the upper-class Jesuit Catholicism and Joan representing that of the middle-class Methodist Protestantism.

Sigmund Freud's Civilization and its Discontents presents a

hypothesis in which the retreat from self is explained by a battle between the Id, the Ego and the Super-Ego. According to Freud, the ideal biblical commandment, to love one's neighbour as oneself, is justified by the fact that nothing else runs so strongly counter to the original nature of man. [9]

The world in which Hébert's protagonist Elisabeth exists in one in which the psychology of the duality of man is justified in the New Testament; God revealing himself to the hearts of men (good) but men refusing to listen (evil):

> For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; 19 Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. 20 For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his external power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse; 21 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified them not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. 22 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, 23 And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. 24 Wherefore God also gave them up to cleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: 25 Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Romans 1: 18-25.

Hébert's protagonist Elisabeth battles between her angelic and demonic selves; her psychology is one in which the commandments to love one's neighbour as oneself (and 'thou shalt not commit adultery' and 'thou

shalt not kill') run in direct opposition to her desire for George Nelson and her desire for Antoine Tassy's murder. Elisabeth, raised in the New Testament teachings of the Catholic Church would view her division and retreat from self as a normal, if not essential fact of the universe; the main thread running through all her divisions and illusions is an overwhelming sense of guilt: she will never be free from her demonic side or from her angelic side. Like the Chinese philosophy of the Yin and the Yang, everything is balanced by the good and evil. Because of her guilt, through her inability to accept her demonic side, Elisabeth does not reach a state of self-acceptance as does Prometheus, who commits hubris by stepping outside of his moira, or Hamlet, who questions to be or not to be; the latter two accept their ultimate fate: Prometheus had his moira restored and Hamlet, at peace, utters, 'let be.' Elisabeth, however, never reaches this state of peace: like the people spoken of in Romans 1:21, Elisabeth refuses to integrate her demonic self with her angelic self.

Although Atwood's protagonist Joan lives in an unrestricted world in which absolutes tend to shift and change according to the moment, she is nonetheless a product of her strict middle-class Puritan upbringing. Also, from Atwood's point of reference, Joan lives in a deeply flawed male world in which women still hold many illusions. Like Hébert's Elisabeth, Joan's retreat from self in induced by an inner conflict between her exaggerated sense of who she thinks she really is (a duplicitous monster) and what she perceives others think she should be.

Atwood's earlier novel The Edible Woman presents a similar dilemma for protagonist Marian, who becomes so afraid of being consumed (being made over by men into different images) that she bakes a cake in the shape of a woman (herself) and forces her boyfriend to eat it:

> 'You've been trying to destroy me, haven't you,' she said.
> 'You've been trying to assimilate me. But I've made you a substitute, something you'll like much better. This is what you really wanted all along, isn't it? 10

Atwood's duplicitous universe is partly the fault of men: the patriarchal society exploiting women, trying to forge them to be anything the men want them to be; the same is true for Elisabeth's world, dominated by men and religion.

NOTES 1 INTRODUCTION

1

A. E. Crawley, "Doubles," in: A. Hastings, ed., The Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics (London: 1908 - 1926).

2

Sherrill Grace, "Margaret Atwood and the Poetics of Duplicity" in: A. E. Davidson, ed., The Art of Margaret Atwood: Essays in Criticism (Toronto: House of Anansi Press Ltd., 1981), p.56.

3

Dostoevsky's The Double represents a mental process that follows the formula of the liberation of a suppressed body of ideas from the unconscious into the conscious mind; and its prototype is the incident planned, but never explicitly used, for an early novel, which the author once related to friends: a middle-aged man is lying in bed in an agreeable state between sleep and waking, when he is suddenly tormented by an indefinable feeling of mental discomfort; it proves to be the memory of a crime he had committed twenty years before, when he had violated a little girl; this he had forgotten until now, when it chooses to emerge painfully from his unconscious mind. Cf. Ralph Tymms, Doubles in Literary Psychology (Cambridge: Bowes & Bowes, 1949), p.99.

4

Anne Hébert, Kamouraska (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1982). All future quotations from Kamouraska will be taken from this edition.

5

Hébert's Kamouraska depicts a similar pattern where the older protagonist Élisabeth, faced by the impending death of her husband, becomes tormented by guilt over an event from twenty years ago in her past; her complicity to murder her husband.

6

Betty Friedan, The Feminine Mystique (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1983), p.32.

7

John Stuart Mill, The Subjection of Women (Cambridge, Mass: The M.I.T. Press, 1978), p.32.

8

----------. Le Soleil, 26 septembre 1970, "Anne Hébert," in: Anne Hébert - Dossier de Presse 1942 - 1980 (Sherbrooke, Québec: Bibliothèque de Séminaire de Sherbrooke, 1981), p.50.

9

Cf. Maurice Emond, La Femme à La Fenêtre (Laval, Québec: Les Presses de L'université Laval, 1984), p.299.

10 Cf. A. E. Crawley, "Doubles" in: A. Hastings, ed. Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics (London: 1908 - 1926).

11 Robert Lecker, "Janus through the Looking glass: Atwood's First Three Novels" in: A. E. Davidson, ed., The Art of Margaret Atwood: Essays in Criticism (Toronto: House of Anansi Press Ltd., 1981), p.177.

12 Clara Thomas, "Lady Oracle: The Narrative of a Fool-Heroine" in: A. E. Davidson, ed., The Art of Margaret Atwood: Essays in Criticism (Toronto: House of Anansi Press Ltd., 1981), p.161.

13 Sherrill Grace, "Margaret Atwood and the Poetics of Duplicity" in: A. E. Davidson, ed., The Art of Margaret Atwood: Essays in Criticism (Toronto: House of Anansi Press Ltd., 1981), p.55.

14 Margaret Atwood, Lady Oracle (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 1976). All future quotations from Lady Oracle will be taken from this edition.

1 Betty Friedan, The Feminine Mystique (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1983), p.40.

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Linda Hutcheon, "From Poetic to Narrative Structures: The Novels of Margaret Atwood," in: S. E. Grace & L. Weir, eds., Margaret Atwood: Language, Text and System (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1983), p.28.

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Maria Leach, ed., The Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1984), p.1, 154.

2

"Vampire" in: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 11th Edition, 1910.

3

The dualist nature of man as put forth by the Christian religion describes the essence of life's choices as a struggle between the good side of the spirit and the evil side of the flesh; man should strive for the victory of the immortal soul over the mortal body. This concept of good versus evil is evident in the New Testament of Jesus Christ in the book of John, chapter 12, verse 25: "He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal." Cf. The Holy Bible: King James Version (Cleveland: The World Publishing Co., 1976).

1 Milan V. Dimic, "The Shadow" in: Jean-Charles Seigneuret, ed., Dictionary of Literary Themes and Motifs (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987).

2 Raymond Deloy Jameson, "Shadows" in: Maria Leach, ed., Funk & Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1984), p.1001.

3 Lucille Roy, Entre La Lumière et L'ombre: L'univers Poètic d'Anne Hébert (Sherbrooke: Québec: Editions Naaman, 1984), p.144.

4 Ibid., p.145.

1

Gertrude Stein, Ida (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), p.7.

2

Maurice Emond, La Femme à la Fenêtre: L'univers symbolique d'Anne Hébert dans **Les Chambres de Bois, Kamouraska** et **Les Enfants du Sabbat** (Québec: Les presses de l'université Laval, 1984), p. 325.

3

Ibid., p.330. Emond goes on in greater detail discussing Hébert's use of the Narcissus myth in Kamouraska, with direct references to the Narcissus story: 'Alors Narcisse ne dit pas: Je m'aime tel que je suis,' il dit: 'Je suis tel que je m'aime. Je suis avec effervescence parce que je m'aime avec ferveur. Je veux paraître, donc je dois augmenter ma parure.' Elisabeth se cherche une beauté qu'elle retrouve en se mirant dans la glace. Tout peut s'écrouler autour d'elle pourvu qu'elle puisse se reconnaître dans la glace telle qu'elle a toujours voulu et séduisante. Devant sa beauté rassurée, elle peut amour qui la 'lave à mesure,' chassant 'tout faute, toute peur, toute honte,' ce n'est pas tant le souvenir d'un homme aimé que son amour d'elle-même. C'est ce regard amoureux et idéalisant qu'elle jette sur elle-même qui la sauve du naufrage et que, grâce à la complicité d'une glace, tel un miroir d'eau, la lave lui rend toute sa beauté. 'Ce narcissisme idéalisant réalise alors la sublimation de la caresse. 'L'image contemplée est une volupté visuelle. Elle n'a nul besoin de la main caressante. Narcisse se complaît dans une caresse linéaire, virtuelle, formalisée. 'Son regard fasciné assure sa beauté et l'immoraltalise. Elisabeth rêve d'être belle à jamais. Tout peut recommencer.

4

Ibid., p.337.

5

According to classical mythology, there are two stories about Narcissus; the most popular is that of the beautiful youth who fell in love with his own reflection in a pool; he was so enamored of himself that he scorned the love of Echo and all others. Some legends say that Nemesis (others say Artemis) punished his arrogance and pride by causing him to fall in love with his own reflection. When he began to pine away with his longing, he was charged to the flower that bears his name. A less familiar story is told by Pausanias. Narcissus had a twin sister with whom he fell in love, and when he died, he went to a pool, saw his relfection, and imagined that he saw not his own image but that of his sister. In current psychonalysis the word **narcissism** is used to mean excessive self-love. Cf. J. E. Zimmerman, Dictionary of Classical Mythology (New York: Bantam Books, 1985), pp.171-72.

6
Maurice Emond, La Femme à la Fenêtre: L'univers symbolique d'Anne Hébert (Québec: Les presses de l'université Laval, 1984), p.338.

7
Ralph Tymms, Doubles in Literary Psychology (Cambridge: Bowes & Bowes, 1949), p.104. We also see a similar indication of the separation from self through the vehicle of the mirror in Otto Rank's critical discussion of the role of the mirror image as separation from self inducing the appearance of a Doppelgänger: 'Au bureau, son Double lui paraît voler la faveur de ses collègues et de ses superieurs. Dans sa vie privée, il semble réussir auprès toujours en fuite devant son Double, il se voit entrouré d'un grand nombre de personnes qui lui resemblent et auxquelles il ne peut pas échapper ... cet situation le tourmente aussi pendant le jour, de sort, qu'en fin de comte, il provoquera son ennemi à un duel au pistolet. A côté de cet motif principal, les scènes du miroir ne manquent pas. Leur importance ressort du fait que le roman commence par une semblable scène de miroir. A peine était-il sorti du lit, qu'il se précipita sur un petit miroir rond qui était sur une commode aussi, quoique la figure endormie, avec des yeux de myope et la chevelure clairsemée, qui le regardait dans la glace, fût d'une médiocrité telle que certainement elle n'eût attiré l'attention de personne, son propriétaire semblait très content de ce qu'il voyait. Cf. Otto Rank, Don Juan: Un étude sur le Double (Paris: Denoel & Steele, 1972), pp. 51-2.

8
Ralph Tymms, Doubles in Literary Psychology (Cambridge: Bowes & Bowes, 1949), p.105.

9
Cf. Anne Hébert, Les Chambres de bois (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1958), p.78.

10
Frank Davey, Margaret Atwood: A Feminist Poetics (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1984), pp. 94, 98.

11
The image of the Medusa imposed upon Joan's mother is indicative of the extent of anger and hostility felt against her mother. According to classical mythology, the Medusa is one of three Gorgons, the daughters of Phorcys and Ceto. Medusa was mortal; the other two, Euryale and Steno, were immortal. The eyes of the Gorgons had the power of killing or turning onlookers into stone. Perseus killed Medusa, cut off her head, and placed it on the shield of Athena, where it had the same pertrifying power as when Medusa was alive. The role of the mirror in connection with the Medusa legend is significant. Cf. J. E. Zimmerman, Dictionary of Classical Mythology (New York: Bantam Books, 1985), pp.161-2.

12 Frank Davey, Margaret Atwood: A Feminist Poetics (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1984), p.98.

1

E. D. Blodgett, Configuration: Essays on the Canadian Literatures (Toronto: ECW Press, 1982), p.61.

2

Maurice Emond, La Femme à la Fenêtre (Québec: Les presses de L'université Laval, 1984), p. 321.

3

Ibid., p.322. Emond strengthens his argument concerning the window as Elisabeth's self-imposed prison: 'L'importance de la fenêtre apparaît également des les premières pages de Kamouraska pour se confirmer par la suite tout au long du roman. Nous trouvons Elisabeth enfermée dans sa maison, rue du Parloir, avec son mari malade, allant de la fenêtre au lit sans pouvoir s'échapper. C'est par le fenêtre qu'elle a vu le bel été, puisqu'elle n'a pas quitté sa maison pour aller à la campagne. C'est encore pas la fenêtre qu'elle épie les bruits de la pluie ou d'une charrette dans la nuit et qu'elle surveille le va-et-vient des gens de la maison. a l'arrivée de Florida, la servante, Elisabeth 'se penche à la fenêtre,' perdu dans une vague rêverie.

1

Robert Lecker, "Janus through the Looking Glass: Atwood's First Three Novels" in: A. E. Davidson, ed., The Art of Margaret Atwood: Essays in Criticism (Toronto: House of Anansi Press Ltd., 1981), p.210.

2

Linda Hutcheon, "From Poetic Narrative Structures: The Novels of Margaret Atwood" in: S. E. Grace, & L. Weir, eds. Margaret Atwood: Language, Text and System (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1983), p.28.

1
Linda Hutcheon, Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox (New York: Methuen, Inc., 1984), p.2.

2
Ibid., pp. 153-4.

3
Roland Barthes, S/Z (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), p.5.

4
Ibid., p.4.

5
Anne Hébert, Les Chambres de bois (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1985), p.112.

6
Margaret Atwood, "The Man from Mars," in: Dancing Girls and Other Stories (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 1977), p.35.

7
Sandra Gilbert & Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), p.240.

8
Mary Shelley, Frankenstein (New York: New American Library, 1965), p.108.

9
Sigmund Freud, Civilization and its Discontents (London: The Hogarth Press, 1979), p.49.

10
Margaret Atwood, The Edible Woman (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 1969), p.271.

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